

The Promise of Victory

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Are you happy with your life? Do you feel like you've always made the right choices and are proud of everything you've done? If you could turn back the clock, would you do everything the same way? Or maybe you wouldn't mind getting a fresh start or at least a partial reset?

Preparing for Rosh HaShanah, the Day of Judgment, involves a great deal of introspection. (If you haven't started yet, now may be a good time!) Naturally, as we think back and remember our deeds (or misdeeds), many of these questions nag at us and prey on our conscience. Interestingly, the process described in this week's *parashah* is extremely relevant.

When the Holy Temple stood, farmers in Israel would make a

special trip to Jerusalem each year. They would bring along their “first fruits,” or *bikkurim*, which they placed in a basket to present to the Kohen. Each farmer would declare:

“An Aramean tried to do destroy my father. He descended to Egypt and stayed there, few in number. There he became a large, powerful and populous nation. The Egyptians treated us cruelly and harmed us, and they imposed harsh labor upon us... HaShem heard our voice and saw our pain, our toil and our oppression. He took us out of Egypt with a strong hand and an outstretched arm, with great awe, with signs and with wonders. He brought us to this place and He gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey...” (Deuteronomy 26:5-9).

As the farmer presented his bounty, he reflected on how he had arrived at this special destination. The Aramean is Laban, who continually switched Jacob’s wages and tried to harm him. However, ultimately, not only did Laban fail, but Jacob was able to marry Laban’s two precious daughters who would give birth to the “perfect offspring,” the holy twelve tribes. Similarly, we were exiled in Egypt as slaves, small in number, but were redeemed as a great nation, populous and wealthy.

The story of our forefathers is the story of our lives, too. The events that we read about in the Torah simultaneously take place in the spiritual worlds. Thus, the ploys of Laban or Pharaoh are the work of the forces of evil seeking to destroy our faith and trust in the Oneness of God. We face these very same threats in our daily lives, whether they are directed at us by those around us, or by our own negative thoughts. Our daily battles to connect our every action and experience to Godliness parallel the events in the Torah. And just as Jacob and Moses were victorious, so too, in the end, we will be victorious.

The Midrash explains that the Torah begins with the word *Bereishit* (“In the beginning” or “At first”) because the world was created for the purpose of *reishit* (first). The first

fruits are one of the things the Midrash calls “first” (*Bereishit Rabbah* 1:4). The first fruits teach us that living is really all about making new beginnings.

Rebbe Nachman says that every day is an entirely new creation. God knew before creating the world that man would err; we are therefore taught that *teshuvah* (repentance) preceded the creation of the world. The purpose of creation is for us to begin again and again. We can do this successfully by remembering that yes, yesterday might have been rough, but just as in the stories of the Torah, God will bring about our ultimate salvation.

Rebbe Nachman says that even if someone transgressed the entire Torah thousands of times, there is still hope! It is our job to strengthen our faith, start afresh, and wait for the time when we, too, will experience our redemption. Amen!

Based on Likutey Halakhot Basar BeChalav 4:13