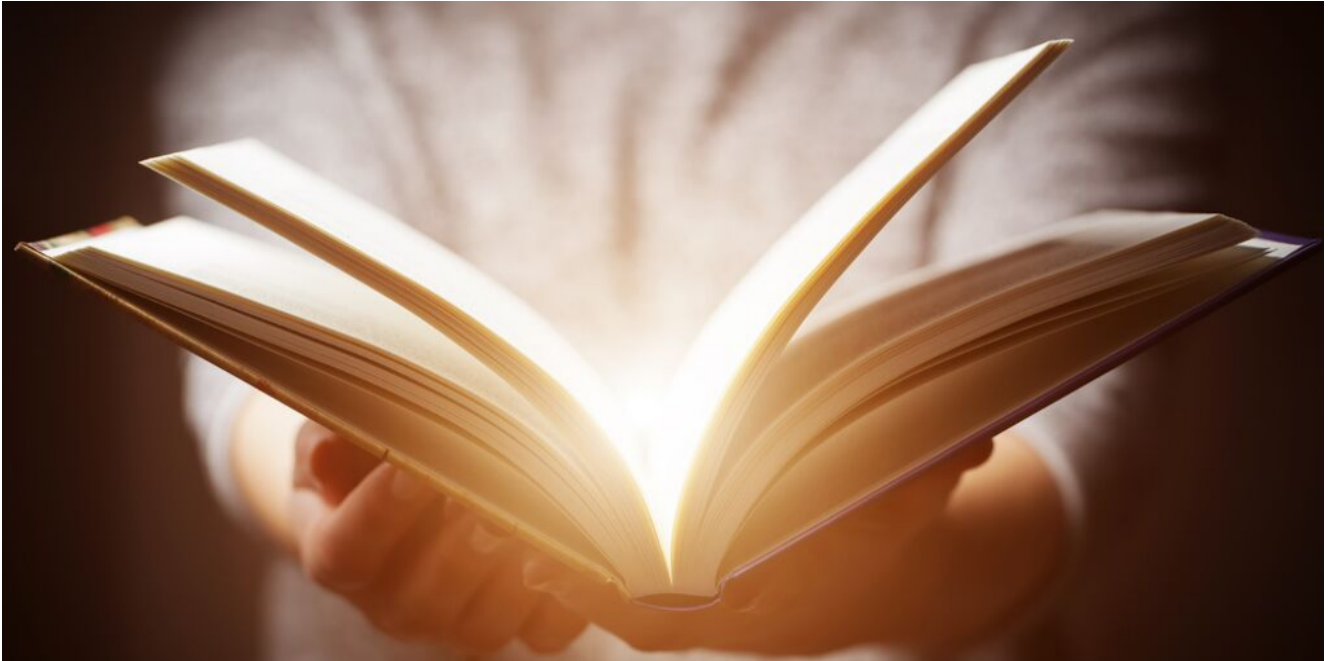


# The Story of Our Lives

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Are you happy with your life? Can you say that 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 again? Don't you wish that life would just proceed in an orderly and successful way?

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. But this is similar to the process described in this week's parashah.

When the Holy Temple stood, farmers in Israel would make a special trip each year to Jerusalem. They would bring along their bikkurim, or "first fruits," which they placed in a basket to present to the Kohen. Each farmer would declare:

"An Aramean tried to 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. ... God 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).

Declaring this, the farmer presenting his bounty reflected on the awesome place he had arrived at. He was living in his own country, the Holy Land, and was personally bringing his crops to the Holy Temple, the holiest place on earth. What a privilege! But he would also remember the many setbacks along the way. An Aramean named Laban had continually switched his ancestor Jacob's wages and tried to harm him. His people had been exiled in Egypt as slaves, cruelly oppressed and murdered. Yet despite all this, not only did Laban fail, but Jacob was able to marry both of Laban's precious daughters, who would later give birth to the "perfect offspring," the holy Twelve Tribes. Likewise, in spite of the Egyptian exile, the Jews were redeemed as a great nation, populous and wealthy.

This is the story of our lives, too. 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 and His perfect plan. We are bombarded by negative thoughts, questioning whether we are really "going anywhere" and if there is any purpose to our actions. Just as Jacob and Moses were victorious, so too, in the end, we will be victorious. But we must first remember that our ancestors did not arrive via a smooth path.

God knew that man was destined to err. Therefore He created teshuvah (repentance) before the creation of the world. Furthermore, 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 (beginnings). This is represented by the first or beginning fruit (Bereishit

Rabbah 1:4).

The bringing of the first fruits teaches us how to live a life of ultimate purpose – a life of new beginnings and renewal. We remember that yes, yesterday might have been rough, but just as in the stories of the Torah, God will bring about our ultimate salvation.

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