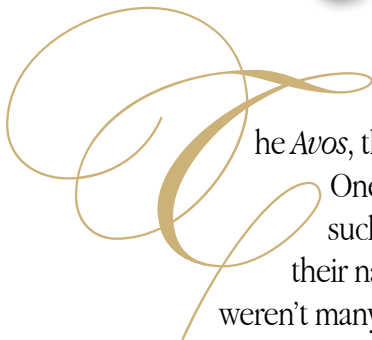


Vayechi

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The *Avos*, the *Gemora* says, were called *Yesharim*, the Upright Ones, and that they were. Few, if any other peoples, have such illustrious ancestors who created the foundation of their nation on such Godly principles. In their time, there weren't many people of God, and the few that were around did create nations.

But their lives were anything but straightforward. There were trials and tribulations at every corner for them, *especially* Ya'akov *Avinu*, as he wearily told Pharaoh in last week's *parsha*. But they stayed true to God through thick and thin, as the *Gemora* says here through God's criticism of Moshe *Rabbeinu*:

It's too bad about the ones who are lost and are no longer to be found. Many times I [only] revealed Myself to Avraham, Yitzchak, and Ya'akov as *El Shaddai*, and they never questioned Me nor asked, "*What is Your Name?*" I told Avraham, "*Walk the length and width of the land that I am giving to you*" (*Bereishis* 13:17), and yet when he wanted a place to bury Sarah, he couldn't find anything until he purchased land for 400 *shekels*! (*Sanhedrin* 111a)

What this means is that the *Avos* never doubted God's love for them even when they failed at things they thought God wanted them to do. A person may want to win the lottery, but it is hard to be angry at God for losing it. To win so much money so easily with so many other people trying to do the same thing takes a lot more merit than any of us could ever hope to have. But to fail at a *mitzvah*, or at least to struggle to complete one, well, that's something we would hope God would help us with and guarantee us to succeed.

Is that only something a person can do on the level of the *Avos*? After all, Moshe *Rabbeinu* seems to have struggled with it at first. Or, is it something that can be learned by anyone who takes the time to learn it?

The answer to that question came to me from a conversation I had with someone last week, and the way they said they dealt with issues that bother them. Not only is it insightful and really helpful, but it is even fun.

He said that he suffered frustration in the *minyan* where he *davened*. He seemed to have to wait longer than others to be called up for an *aliyah* to the Torah. When he complained to the *gabbai* about the situation, the *gabbai* said he tried to be fair, and for a while after, he was called up more often.

But after time, the situation returned to “normal,” and he would watch others get called up two or three times before he was called up once. Whether the *gabbai* realized it or not, he had his favorites, especially when it came to *aliyos* on special occasions.

He didn't want to complain again, so he considered changing *minyans*. But everything else about the *minyan* he liked, so he was hesitant. He didn't know what to do, especially since the situation had blown out of proportion, and he seemed to think about it a lot more than he cared to. He could tell himself that he didn't care, but how could he say that about making a *brochab* over the Torah?

That's when he decided to look for the wins in the losses. He recalled the *Gemora* that said if a person wants to do a *mitzvah* but is prevented from doing so for reasons beyond his control, it is counted in Heaven as if he did the *mitzvah* (*Brochos* 6a). He wanted the *mitzvah*. The *gabbai* was the one who didn't choose him. Therefore, he still got the reward as if he had been called up. . . without the pressure of being up on the *bimah*!

He likes to learn Torah between *aliyos*, something he loses when he goes up for an *aliyah*. Not going up for reasons he cannot control gives him that time. Furthermore, being pained by the situation meant he underwent some *yesurim*, which only adds to a person's merit, and by judging the *gabbai* on the side of merit and not speaking *loshon bara* about him, he passed a test, giving him even more *zechus*.

Once he tallied his gains for not being called up against his gains for going up, he felt the situation turn around in his favor. Of course, he would love to go up and make a *brochab* over the Torah, but at least he now had a way to gain from being skipped over, and that made the situation tolerable once again.

I've tried this approach to disappointment a few times since, and I have to say, it works. And the amazing thing is, it is not just rationalization to make a difficult situation easier than it is. A lot of times, the other perspective I have gone to has been real, less obvious, but real. After all, what we think God wants from us may not necessarily be what he actually wants from us at any given moment. Success, from a

Torah perspective, can flip-flop sometimes based upon circumstances and the needs of the moment.

That's how the *Avos* approached life, and especially those situations that seemed to backfire on them while doing what they thought was the will of God. And that's what Moshe *Rabbeinu* learned from that dialogue mentioned in the *Gemora*. It's a spiritually more sophisticated path through life which rarely serves up success as we define it.