What should we do with our Broken Tablets?

,□□□□□ □□□□ □□□□□□ □□□□ □□□□ □□□□□ :□□□□□ □□□ □□ □□□□□ □□□ □□□
□□□□□ □□□□□□ □□□□□ □□□□□ □□□□□□
□ □□ □□□□□

THE GOLDEN CALF

In this week's Parasha the people of Israel experience one of the most shocking events in its long history: the worshipping of the Golden Calf. When Moses ascended Mount Sinai, he announced that he would return in 40 days. On the eve of the 40th day, the people thought that Moses would never return ("no human could survive without food or water for so long", they thought). To replace Moshe, they built a golden idol, a calf, one of the many Egyptian idols. This was a great sin. Only a few days ago, the people of Israel witnessed the revelation of God at Mount Sinai. And just a few weeks before that, they saw the opening of the Red Sea and the ten plagues in Egypt. How could it be possible that now they come back to idolatry? Moshe was coming down the mountain with the Tablets of the Law, but when he saw the people completely uncontrolled and worshiping an Egyptian idol, he threw the Tablets and broke them into pieces.

THE OLD TABLETS

Today, I will not focus on the most important question: why Moshe broke the tablets? I want to concentrate on something that perhaps seems secondary or irrelevant but has a great moral lesson for all of us. As we know, later on, Moses received a "copy" of the Tablets of the Law. He placed a new set of Luchot in the Ark of the Covenant (Aron haBerit). And the question is: what happened to the first Tablets, the little pieces of the broken Tablets? Perhaps they were left

there, abandoned, in the desert, because now they were useless tablets? Our rabbis explain that the remains of the broken tables were collected by Moshe and deposited in the Ark of the Covenant next to the new tables. A famous rabbi of the Talmud, Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi derived from this action a wonderful lesson in respect to our elders. “This event comes to teach us, he said, that to an old man who lost his memory, we owe the same respect we gave him when his memory was intact …”.

BROKEN MEMORY

Imagine a great Tora scholar, someone who for years was invited to sit in the front row of the synagogue because he taught Tora to others and captivated everyone present with his eloquent speeches. And now, at his advanced age, he lost his eloquence and his memory because of senility or Alzheimer, and he can no longer speak or even reason as before. What type of honor do we owe him in his present situation? Do we still invite him to sit in the front row? Or perhaps, because he has lost his memory and does not have any content to give, we sit him in the back? The unequivocal answer of Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi is: we honor him as we used to do. Why? Because this old man is like the broken Tablets of the Law, which were no longer intact, complete, or useful, and still Moshe placed the broken, “useless” old Tablets in the same honorable place: inside the Ark! This old man has lost his wisdom. His memory is now broken, and his mind is in one piece anymore. He no longer has any content to share with us. And still, we should honor him exactly as when his memory and mind were intact. This is a beautiful lesson of respect and honor that we learn from a seemingly superfluous detail of the Tora: the placement of the old, broken Tablets.

BROKEN MEMORIES

There might be another answer to why the old broken tablets were not discarded or buried but “treasured” alongside the new ones. Perhaps the Tablets were not buried to serve as a

testimony for the Jewish people. So we Jews never forget the greatest sin we committed. And future generations don’t repeat the same mistakes. We all had bad experiences. We all make mistakes. But we should not bury these mistakes in our memory. Rather, we should learn from those negative experiences. With the right mindset, past negative experiences can be transformed into critical lessons for the future. And not only for ourselves but also for our loved ones, friends, and others in need.

In 2016, I received the devastating news that I had been diagnosed with stage 3 colon cancer. It was undoubtedly the most difficult and painful experience of my life. However, with the grace of God, I am now in a much better place and feeling healthier than ever before. Despite my hesitance to talk about it, I am writing about my cancer for the first time today. The memories of chemotherapy, nausea, pain, fatigue, hospital rooms, dizziness, fears, and tears still linger in my mind. Still, I try to keep these broken memories safely stored away from the world, and even my family, in my personal Ark.

However, there are instances when I open up about my experiences. When? When I meet a community member, a friend, or anyone who was diagnosed with cancer, I feel compelled to show them my scar from the chemo port. The scar may be small, but it carries immense weight for the person sitting across from me. By sharing this vulnerable aspect of myself, I hope to show them that I truly understand what they are going through. As a rabbi, I have always tried to understand and support people with cancer. However, I now realize that despite my best intentions and genuine efforts, there are some things that can only be truly understood through personal experience. My own struggles have given me a new perspective and empathy for those who are facing similar battles. While I may still keep my broken memories in my personal ark, I am now more open to using them as a source of comfort and support for others who are going through difficult times.

.

TETZAVE: The Cohen Gadol and the Responsibility of Wearing a Jewish Uniform

A BRIEF HISTORY OF MORALITY

The first time the Tora refers to clothing, using the most generic word Kutonet, is in the context of creation. After tasting the forbidden fruit, Adam and Eve, the first humans, experienced a "reset" of their minds. Until then, their neshama, *ruach memalelah*, or verbal intelligence endowed them with the ability to think linguistically—with words—which allowed them to possess a supernatural ability: freedom of choice. While animals "perceive" reality in images (or smells or sounds) and react instinctively to them, human beings process reality with words—that is, they "think." Humans can see, hear, and then calculate, speculate, contemplate, anticipate, obey, and disobey. By rebelling against the first (and only) Divine order, man, paraphrasing Maimonides, activated the power of his "imagination," making it an integral part of his thought process. The consequences of this could be potentially disastrous. Now, human supernatural powers, "words" are not used to serve God but to justify disobedience. Human beings can now "see" the advantages of their abilities for personal benefit. Power can be used to help or do good to others—as the Creator does—and to subdue or oppress others. Sexuality, beyond its two explicit purposes—1. To intimately unite husband and wife, 2. To imitate the Creator in recreating another life—can also be channeled

toward abuse, infidelity, rape, etc. By covering his nakedness and differentiating himself from animals, man reminds himself that he must employ his powers for the purpose for which the Creator conceived them.

YOSEF AND THE BURDEN OF REPRESENTATION

The second time kutonet appears in the Tora is when Jacob gives his son a special robe: colored clothing that functions as a uniform and represents the authority granted by his father to supervise the tasks of his brothers and inform them about their behavior. As we already know, the consequences of Jacob's decision and the humbleness not exercised by Yosef, were crucial in our history. This colored uniform, or kutonet, led us to Egypt and then into slavery. In our Parasha, Tetzave, the kutonet appears for the third and last time in the Tora when describing the Cohen Gadol's uniform. The Cohen's clothing, more than a garment to cover nudity, is a uniform that conveys a representative position, and his wearer carries the weight of the responsibility of representation.

THE DOUBLE REPRESENTATION

On the one hand, the Cohen represents the ideal of a Jew: the consecration of one's life to achieve closeness to (by serving) the Creator. The Cohen Gadol also represented the Jewish people before God. And this was manifested in the twelve stones that he wore on his breastplate, with the names of the 12 tribes of Israel. The Cohanim knew very well that their privileged position implied greater responsibility. And the Tora commands them to be aware that, even involuntarily, one can get carried away by the splendor of his uniform, feeling as if it were an honor displayed to the person and not his office. The consequences can be disastrous. A police uniform, for example, should inspire honesty, trustworthiness, and service. If a police officer were to use the power of his or her uniform for personal gain or abuse of power, he or she would be misrepresenting the uniform, the office, and by

extension, dishonoring the entire Police Department.

I remember, as a teenager asking one of my teachers about the benefits and risks of wearing a Jewish uniform while traveling on buses and trains and interacting with non-Jews. I asked my teacher if wearing a cap or a Kippa on the street would be more appropriate. My teacher replied, “It all depends on how you behave.” The Kippa is a catalyst that clearly identifies you as a Jew, unlike a more generic baseball cap or hat. If I behave properly, I will likely fulfill the great Mitzva of Qiddush HaShem, which means elevating God’s name and enhancing the reputation of the Tora and its Divine Author. However, if I behave badly and let myself be carried away by my impulses and imagination more than by my reason and by the Tora among gentiles, I would be transgressing the most serious of all sins in the Tora: Chillul HaShem, affecting negatively the reputation of the Creator.

My teacher added a memorable reflection: “Never forget that to wear the Kippa, you must first have a head!”

Yosef and the secrets of his success

YOSEF, THE MANAGER

Yosef was sold by his brothers and transported to the slave market in Egypt, where he was acquired by Potiphar, a minister in Pharaos court. In Potiphar’s house, Yosef stands out. His master realizes that the slave he had bought for manual labor was a genius at administration. And he also inspired trust. Potiphar leaves all his assets and household, probably hundreds of people, in the hands of Yosef. Seemingly, Yosef

had found his final destination; even though he was away from his family, at least he was in a privileged position. Being promoted to “manager” was the ultimate dream, the utopia, of any slave. However, got worse for Yosef. Potifar’s wife provokes him. But Yosef does not succumb, and he rejects her advances with great subtlety but firmness. He tried to reason with the woman and explained to her that what she wanted to do would be a great sin against her husband and, above all, against God. “How could I do something so wrong and sin against God” (Gen. 39:9). But Potiphar’s wife did not take Yosef’s rejection well: she felt offended that a man, a slave under her command! rejected her. And she falsely accused Yosef of abuse. Potiphar, I think, did not believe his wife – if he had, he would have killed Yosef on the spot – but he could not ignore her and had to save his family’s honor, so he sent Yosef to a dungeon.

YOSEF IN AND OUT OF PRISON

Yosef’s situation is now desperate. His sentence is for life. Yosef goes from being a successful manager with privileges to the lowest level a human being could reach in Egypt: a slave sentenced to prison. In Egypt, the value of a slave’s life was probably less than that of a horse or a dog. What can be said then about the insignificant value of a slave in prison? However, thanks to his personality and hardworking character, Yosef also wins the trust of the head of the prison, who, like Potifar, leaves the administration in the hands of Yosef.

Yosef takes care of two VIP prisoners, Pharaoh’s ministers. Both had very strange dreams. And Yosef, who knew a lot about dreams, tells one of the two ministers, the one in charge of Pharaoh’s beverages (making sure that the drinks were not poisoned), that he was going to be released and restored to court. And Yosef takes advantage of this fortuitous circumstance and asks the minister to remember him, and as payback for interpreting his dream positively, he begs him to tell Pharaoh, through one of his officers, to release Yosef

from prison, since he is innocent!

A HAPPY END

But as the days or weeks go by, Yosef realizes his hope is a fantasy. Pharaoh's minister forgot Yosef and consciously erased him from his memory. Because, naturally, the last thing the minister would have wanted was something to remind his boss – who had given him a second chance – of his days in jail! One day, however, Pharaoh has a disturbing dream, and no one can interpret it. At that moment, the minister –knowing that now he was not "asking" but "doing" Pharaoh a favor– informs him that there is a young Hebrew man in jail who knows how to interpret dreams. Yosef is brought into the palace and then, as we all know, becomes Pharaoh's right-hand man, which allows him to identify his brothers and eventually reconcile with them.

WHAT WOULD HAVE HAPPENED IF…?

One of the great life lessons that Yosef's story teaches us is that we often desperately want something to happen NOW. We pray and beg HaShem and do everything we can to achieve it… and in the end, it might NOT happen. But after a while, we might be looking at our lives and realize that THANKS TO WHAT WE WANTED TO HAPPEN AND DID NOT HAPPEN, we now have a better opportunity, or we are now in a better position!
Yosef desperately wanted Pharaoh's minister to exert all his influence to get out of prison. I suppose that Yosef must have waited impatiently day and night for someone to come and get him out of jail on behalf of Pharao's minister. But imagine for a second if that had happened: Yosef would be now out of jail, with no money, no family, and with the record of an ex-convict slave. He could not have gotten very far…. He would have been sold as a slave a second time. And in the best of cases scenario, he would have ended his life being a good slave manager in someone's household. The same would have happened if Potiphar's wife would not have accused Yosef of

improper behavior.

PATIENCE AS A FORM OF FAITH

Yosef learns and teaches us that patience is a form of Emuna, faith. Because many times, things that happen or are not happening to us are eventually for our own good. All the negative experiences that Yosef lived at first made him get lower and lower, to the point of despair. But when Yosef hits rock bottom unexpectedly, and without Yosef ever dreaming of such a scenario, Yosef's life improves meteorically.

Not all of us have the same privilege as Yosef. It is not always possible to see an excellent final resolution for all our problems in life. However, this lesson is so important. I hear virtually every day of someone who did not get the job he so much wanted or someone who failed in a potential shidduch date or in a business deal. We might feel then that God has abandoned us. But then, I hear many people saying, "thanks to the fact that what I so much wanted didn't happen, HaShem helped me to get something better. Or, ", Now I realized that God protected me from a terrible business/job/shidduch, etc."

This is a critical attitude to cultivate in life. Knowing that (or even: ***strategically acting as if***...) when what I pray for is not happening, ultimately, something better might be waiting for me around the corner.

SHABBAT SHALOM

KI TETSE: Walking, with your

eyes wide open

By Rabbanit Coty Bittón

□□□□□□□□□□ □□□□□□ □□□ □□□ □□□□□□□ □□□□□ □□□ □□□□□□□ □□□
□□□□□□□□□□ □□□□□□□□□□ □□□□□□ □□□□□ □□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□

When our oldest son was five, we were fortunate to live in the Jewish quarter in Yerushalayim, the Old City. We used to spend our afternoons together with his three siblings in the park. I remember one time when we were planning to leave the house, and I realized that we had forgotten his tricycle in the park the previous day. My son was obviously very upset. And so was I since we had just bought it for his birthday. We went back to look for it in the park but it wasn't there, and we considered it lost. It was very disappointing!
A couple of days later my husband came home and told my son that they were going for a short trip to town. Although I did not like the idea since our child was already in his pajamas and ready to sleep, I trusted my husband; he told me they would be back soon. Indeed, half an hour later the "three of them were back home: my husband, my son and his tricycle. There are no words to describe my son's happy face!

It happened to be that on his way home my husband read on one of the neighborhood's boards (luach modaot) a note saying that a tricycle was found and that whoever lost it could recover it, by giving a matching description. We took the opportunity to explain to our children about the Mitzva that appears on this week's Perasha, Ki Tetse. It is called "hashabat abeda" , returning a lost object. We all appreciated how wonderful it is when you belong to a society where you know that everybody cares about everybody else!

In any other culture or civilization, you transgress the law when you steal or damage your fellow's property. And, as long as you don't cause any harm, you are a model citizen. Our Tora

demands much more from us. It is not enough to abstain from damaging others. I have to CARE about someone else's property as if it were my own.

If for example, I find a lost object I must take care of it and "find" the owner. In a Jewish society when you find something lost that can be identified (a 10 dollars bill, for example, cannot be "identified"; but a wallet, can), you can not keep it. You have to bother and pick it up, take it home, write the note, post it on the neighborhood's board and be willing to welcome all those who would come and claim for their lost object until someone can identify it (simanim) beyond a reasonable doubt.

In Moreh Nevukhim, Maimonides explains that the primary purpose of this Mitzva is to positively affect the character of the individuals of the Jewish people. The Tora trains us and helps us to develop a degree of sensitivity towards others, which will make us walk with our eyes open to detect the needs of others. Is there anyone here who needs my help? We respect the privacy of others, but we must be careful that this does not lead us to a level of indifference. "It's not my business" should be applied to many privacy issues in the lives of my friends and acquaintances, but not in situations where my assistance is needed. As in the case of hashabat abeda, I have to be willing to offer help, even when it has not been requested.

When we teach our children about this Mitzvah, we train them to be sensitive. "Is your friend sad? Is he going through a difficult time? Ask if you can help." "A new student came to school. Open your eyes, 'see' her. She might be scared or embarrassed. She does not know the teachers or other students. Try to approach her and be her friend."

To fulfill the Mitzvah of *hashabat abeda* you cannot close your eyes and ignore what happens around you. You must develop a

special sensitivity to identify the needs of others and be willing to invest your time and effort to help and assist.
.
SHABBAT SHALOM

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Rabbanit Coty Bitton is a certified marriage and family counselor. Her weekly Tora classes are rich in relationship advice and home improvement. Her Shalom Bayit and parenting workshops combine modern psychology and Torah knowledge. Her email address for referrals and consultations is: cotybitton@yahoo.com

---

Give your children everything they need; not everything they want

"When HaShem your God brings you into the land he promised to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob…a land with large, flourishing cities that you did not build, with houses filled with all kinds of good things, that you did not provide; with wells that you did not dig, and with vineyards and olive groves, that you did not plant – when you eat, and you are satisfied, do not forget HaShem, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery." Deut. 6:10-12

The people of Israel are ready to enter the Promised Land. They will have to fight for it. But HaShem already promised

them that He will join them in the battlefield. No one doubts they will succeed in defeating the enemies and conquering the land. The Tora, therefore, is not concerned about war, fighting, military strategies, simply because the Almighty will be on our side. But the Tora is concerned about peace. About the potential side-effects of “inherited prosperity”. The Israelites will be coming to cities that are fully functional. They won’t even need to build the houses where they will live; the wells, are already filled with water, and the trees, vineyards and olive groves, are already planted and bearing fruits.

This scenario, which seems to be the greatest material dream for any mortal, is tricky. It might become a dangerous spiritual trap. The Tora warns the people of Israel against a a psychological phenomenon known as “affluenza”, that is, the negative side-effects or wealth. Affluenza might take place when one has what he or she needs, wants and wishes. And the most common strand of affluenza affects people who have not worked and made huge sacrifices for what they have; but rather, they have inherited their wealth from others. Those who worked hard for what they have, usually appreciate what they have. Moshe Rabbenu understands that AM ISRAEL is in a similar situation. They will inherit everything for free. With no effort. And Moshe rabenu teaches them this valuable lesson: Beware of inherited well. Do not forget WHO gave it to you, and what HE expects from you: appreciation and kindness.

Many parents wrongly believe that giving their children everything they want without demanding any effort from them, is a way of loving them and for our kids to experience everlasting happiness. But showering our kids with riches and asking them nothing in return, kids will be exuding gratitude and appreciation, and eventually they will imitate them and feel a tremendous need to give and share with others. Many times, however, parents discover that far from raising happy and thankful sons and daughters, they have raised spoiled

children, who do not feel any need to express gratitude and far from become great philanthropist they are always asking for more, and instead of contributing in producing wealth, they feel entitled to freely receive everything they want.

MISHPATIM: Where you sit, matters

□□□□ □□□□□□ □□ □□□□□ □□ □□□□ □□ □□□ □□□□ □□ □□□ □□ □□□□ □□□ □□ □□□

"When you lend money to (someone from) My people, the poor person who lives next to you, you shall not oppress him, and do not take interest from him." Shemot 22:24

In this week's Parasha we have a large number of Mitsvot. Many of these Mitsvot refer to our attitude towards our neighbor. Among them is our obligation to assist the needy.

AVOIDING ECONOMIC COLLAPSE

The rabbis described this commandment, *tsedaqa*, explaining that there are eight categories of material assistance to the needy. The highest category is to help someone to avoiding financial collapse before he gets in a situation where he needs to ask for assistance. How do you do that ? For example: a) Offering work to someone who lost his job. b) Lending money to someone who does poorly in his or her business preventing his falling.

Referring to this second case, the Tora says that the creditor should not charge interest for the loan. Also, the creditor can't harass the debtor, for example, going to his home, or embarrassing him in front of his family or friends, etc.

MY PEOPLE

Another important lesson we learn from this verse is related to a little word that might go unnoticed. That little word is *'ami* (□□□), "*My* People"

God speaks of the poor as "*My* People", that is, the people of God. The Sages said the following: "HaShem is very different

from a human being. In most cases, when someone has a poor family member, he does not like to be seen with him or her, because he does not want to be identified with the poor …. but when someone has a rich relative, runs to him, tries to take a selfie with him, and does everything in his power to show himself in his company. Why? Because being next to the rich and powerful enhances his own image and prestige … HaShem acts differently: when He says "My People" he is not referring to the richest and most powerful but to 'the poor among you'.

HaShem sides with the poor, identifies with them, *and teaches us to do the same*.

YOUR SEAT AND YOUR IMAGE

It is not uncommon, unfortunately, that people who are not wealthy – especially if they are publicly known to be needy- are literally left out. At a social event or a party, not many wants to sit at their table. Everyone wants to be in the company of the rich, and be seeing with them.

This pasuq teaches us that we should learn from God and treat those who have less than us with a special deference. Providing material help is important, but it is also important to help the feelings of this who have less than us! This Pasuq teaches us that we should behave toward those who have less than us in the same way you would like to be treated if you were in that condition.

This beautiful verse teaches us a huge lesson. *HaShem is with the poor, and identifies His presence with the most needy. Being or sitting next to those who have less is a great act of humility, kindness, empathy and above all, an act in which we imitate one of the attributes of our Creator.*

ANTISEMITISM: Jews, a Separated and Powerful People

Yesterday we began to analyze the origins of anti-Semitism in this week's Parasha (see this). We mentioned that the people of Israel were prolific and enjoyed an economic well-being.

The Jews had not committed any act of treason or anything to deserving Pharaoh's hatred. According to what the text of the Tora (peshat) tells us the causes of Pharaoh's antagonism had to do with a new political situation, an opposition to the previous government, which was friendly with the Jews.
We will now discuss the way in which this type of antagonism became a form of a verbal anti-Semitism, that is, the malicious and false accusations against the Jews .

Pharaoh, as explained yesterday, first ignored the contributions of Yosef to the welfare of Egypt.

Now, Pharaoh begins his speech (Shemot 1:9):
□□□□ □□□□□ □□ □□□□□ □□□ □□ □□□: "Pharaoh said to his people: Behold, a people, the children of Israel, are many and powerful from us"

In this pasuq the Tora subtly records the first two accusations of Pharaoh towards Israel.

FIRST ACCUSATION "A people within a people"
"Pharaoh said to 'his' people: Behold, a 'people', the children of Israel….". Almost four long generations had passed since the time the children of Israel came to Egypt (Levi, Qehat, 'amram). And Ya'aqob's family has not assimilated into the Egyptian culture and society. The Jews remained as a united people. What was the strategy to avoid assimilation into the powerful and attractive Egyptian society?

There are many elements mentioned on this matter, either by the Tora or by the Sages. We will mention just four illustrations.

1. □□□□ □□□□ In Parashat Vayggash we see how Yosef insists that his brothers should introduce themselves to Pharaoh as what they are: shepherds. Shepherding was a taboo profession

for Egyptians. The children and grandchildren of Ya’aqob, with the consent and blessing of the previous Pharaoh, reside then in a separate land, Goshen, where they could graze their cattle without offending the sensibilities of the Egyptians. This also avoided social and religious assimilation with the general society.

2. □□□ □□□□□ □□□: The first thing this week’s Parasha tells us is that the children and grandchildren of Ya’aqob did not come to Egypt as single bachelors. The Tora specifies that they came with their wives. In this way they avoided marrying Egyptian women, which would have been the first step into total assimilation.

3. □□□□□ □□□□□ □□□□□□. Our Sages say that Ya’aqob sent one of his sons, Yehuda, before his family arrive to Egypt, to establish bate midrashot, Jewish educational institutions. Jewish education has always been seen by our Hakhamim as the number one element to avoid assimilation.

4. … □□□□□ □□ □□□□ □□ The Israelites kept their Jewish clothing, their language and their Hebrew names. These three elements were also critical for staying together and avoid assimilation into Egyptian society.

Now, in his effort to hurt the Jewish people, Pharaoh maliciously “denounced” Jewish unity as Jewish treachery. “They are a people apart > they will betray us”. Said Pharaoh. Pharaoh was the first, but it was certainly not the last, to use the argument that the Jews “are a people within a people” in order to generate antagonism against the Jews .

We can also see, from the point of view of Israel, for the first time, the double challenge of staying as Jews in a gentile society, doing our utmost for avoiding assimilation, while being exposed for that same reason to the possibility that the tyrant in power would use our Jewishness as an excuse

to accuse and persecute us.

SECOND ACCUSATION: “They stole our money”.
□□□□ □□□□□ □□ “they are many, and very powerful, from us.”
The second charge, completely fabricated, is that Jews were rich and powerful “from us”, in other words, because they have taken “our” money. Pharaoh accused the Jews of having taken away the Egyptians’ money. The Jews were probably prosperous, but nothing indicates that it was because they stole Egyptian money. In fact, as we know, Yosef saved Egypt from ruin and starvation. Thanks to Yosef Egypt was a superpower.

At no time Pharaoh refers to the Jews prosperous situation or to Yosef extraordinary management abilities in a positive way, saying as the Chinese say today about the Jews: “Look at the Jews and learn from them how to succeed. The Jews give priority to studying. They are hard workers. They are never lazy. They don’t spend money unnecessarily. They believe in saving for the future. “. Everything Pharaoh said was: “The Jews are rich because they took our money”. Sounds familiar?

This accusation was repeated thousands of times in the history of the Jewish people while in exile. One example: Martin Luther (1483-1546): “The Jews … became rich by our sweat and blood, and we get poorer by this exploitation.”

Of course all these anti-Semitic arguments collapse when one notes that 41% of Nobel laureates in economics are Jewish (while Jews constitute less than 0.02% of the world population). Or when you see the commercial success of Israel, “the Jew among the nations,” which does prosper by its own sweat and its entrepreneurial capacity (see Startup Nation).

In our Parasha we find the first signs of the anti-Semitic propaganda, which unfortunately will be repeated again and again throughout our exile among the nations.

SHEMOT: The Beginning of the Jewish People and the Beginnings of Antisemitism

We have just finished the book of Bereshit, Genesis. Bereshit is not a book of laws. It is a book that tells us how humanity began and particularly how the "family" of Israel (Bene Israel) was formed. And in Shemot, in the first chapter, we see that the "family" of Israel was transformed into the "people" of Israel. In our Parasha we find for the first time the word, □□ 'am: people, nation, to define "Israel".
These words □□□□□ □□□ □□ □□□ "here is a people, the children of Israel" is mentioned for the first time by Pharaoh, and in a very particular context. Pharaoh refers to the people of Israel in a negative, hostile tone. Today we would say in an "anti-Semitic" way. Pharaoh speaks to his people convincing them that the Jewish people are a great threat to Egypt, and presents them with a plan for the elimination of the Jews. Is it not ironic, and incredible, that the anti-Semitic message of the "final solution" appears in the first and same scene in which "the Jewish people" is born?

How did anti-Semitism start in Egypt? What did the Yehudim do wrong to deserve this treatment from Pharaoh?

There are several and diverse answers to this question. Following one of these interpretations, we could say that this is a fairly common political phenomenon.
In Shemot 1:8 the Tora gives us the first clues: "And a new Pharaoh arose in Egypt, who did not know [=deliberately ignored] Yosef." Who was this new Pharaoh, and why would he choose to ignore Yosef and his enormous contribution to saving Egypt? When a new government, say "the opposition," assumes

the presidency, it is natural that all allies of the previous government automatically become antagonistic to the new government. Example: In a few hours the United States will have a new president, Donald Trump, and it is possible that the countries that President Obama privileged, for example: Iran, will not enjoy the same privileges with President Trump. Something similar, but in the opposite direction, I believe, will take place with Israel, BH.

Back to our Parasha. Imagine that a new Pharaonic dynasty emerged in Egypt, or as some commentators such as Rabbi Shemuel D. Luzzato (Shadal) said: the Egyptians regained the power that had been usurped by the Hyksos two centuries before. In any of these cases, it would be logical that the Jewish people, loved by the previous government, would now be seen with animosity and suspicion by the new government. This hypothesis allows us to learn an enormous lesson about anti-Semitism. Hatred toward Jews does not necessarily happen because of something wrong that we Jews have done. The causes of anti-Semitism are not always the same. For Hitler □"□, Jews were the worst because we were communists; for Stalin because we were capitalists, etc. Anti-Semitism arises for reasons that are far beyond what Jews are, were, do or avoid doing. When we are in exile, and a government treats us well, it does not mean that the next government will automatically treat us well, even if we do not do anything wrong to deserve to be mistreated. This happened hundreds of times in the history of the Jewish people in exile. We lived in peace, tranquility and relative prosperity in Spain until 1492. Something similar happened in Germany before 1938. Until a new Pharaoh emerged in Spain, Germany, England, France, etc.
It is also interesting to see (and compare with the present) how anti-Semitic propaganda is developed, that is, how the tyrant justifies his desire to eliminate the Jewish people.
The Tora tells us that the new Pharaoh □□□□ □□ □□□ □□ "did not know [= chose to ignore] Yosef": The first thing the tyrant does to justify his animosity is to ignore the contributions

of the Jewish people. And the more important these contributions have been, the more effort the sovereign will make to ignore them. The Nazi government ignored the participation and loyalty of the Jews who fought for the "motherland" Germany during the First World War. They ignored the contribution of Jewish scientists and doctors and other men of science and the arts who contributed greatly to the pre-Nazi Germany being one of the most advanced countries in Europe. The Spanish kings ignored the contribution of the Jews in the medical fields, think of Lorenzo Badoz, the doctor who saved the life of Queen Isabel, astronomy and navigation, the studies and inventions of Rabbi Abraham Zacuto, which allowed Columbus to reach America, etc. Today, the world systematically ignores the enormous contributions of the state of Israel to the modern world. Israel stands out in the fields of medicine, technology, agriculture, computing, optics, irrigation, etc., as you can see in this chart:



And instead of Israel being the most admired country in the world, for its incredible contributions to mankind *despite being a country in constant war, and the only country in the world whose existence is threatened,* Israel – the Jew among the nations – was considered by the BBC in 2016 as the country that most "threatens world peace."

Anti-Semitic propaganda did not change. In any case, it became more sophisticated.

Gaining the respect of those who practice a different religion

In this week's Parasha we find Abraham, our first patriarch, in a long conversation with the Hittites, one of the peoples who lived in the land of Canaan. Abraham wants to buy a piece of land in Qiryat Arba, □□Hebron, to bury Sara, his wife, who recently passed away.

MONOTHEISM AND ANTISEMITISM

In the negotiations between Abraham and the Hittites, we see that the leaders of this pagan and very violent nation treated Abraham with great respect. And what is more: they call Abraham "Nasi Eloqim, "You are a representative of God among us". This is very weird since pagans were not known for being open-minded about other "gods" . The mythological gods competed with each other to demonstrate their supremacy. And Abraham not only practiced a different religion: his religion was "monotheistic", which means that excluded the ver claim that other gods exists. In other words, while other people proclaimed: "My gods are more powerful than your gods", the religion of Abraham implied that: "Your gods, simply, do not exist". This should have been considered by the Hittites as an offensive cult. And I assume that they knew that Abraham was a "monotheistic activist", an iconoclast that had *destroyed* the idols of his own father! For this vert reason, monotheism, Jews were for centuries hated, persecuted and seen as closed minded and exclusivist.

Abraham was different even on the physical realm. Now he had circumcision, which made him different from others.

In those times there was no religious tolerance. We saw for

example in the case of Yosef and his brothers in Egypt, that the Egyptians did not eat at the same table of Jews, because they considered their diet something abominable.
How was it then that Abraham, being so different to the Hittites, was respected by them, and surely by other peoples of the region too?
BELIEF or CHARACTER
I think that the Hittites respected Abraham because Abraham was kind, respectful and humble.
1. KINDNESS: Abraham, who was seen by pagans as the representative of God on earth, would have had every reason to act with superiority towards other peoples. Demand, for example, to receive offerings and gifts, as happened with Malqi Tsedq, a priest to whom Abraham gave his tithe. But Abraham, far from expecting others to assist him materially, dedicated himself to serving others. He sat at the entrance of his famous tent waiting to host travelers who needed shade, bread and water.
2. RESPECT: God spoke to Abraham, and promised him and his descendants the land of Canaan. But Abraham never behaved arrogantly in front of the inhabitants of Canaan. His unconditional faith in HaShem could have prompted him to say to the pagans who inhabited the land: "This land will be mine." Abraham treated them with dignity and honor. Abraham represented the epitome of this type of *noblesse oblige*, "the closer you are to God, the more you need to respect and show deference to those who are less religious than you".
3. HUMILITY: The humility of Abraham becomes much more evident when we compare Abraham, as our Sages did, with Bil'am. Bil'am was a pagan prophet. HaShem communicated with Bil'am, as he did with Abraham. But this privilege, instead of making Bil'am more humble, made Bil'am to look down at all other people. Bil'am said to himself: If God spoke to me, who could be compared to me? Bil'am's arrogance made him behave with disdain toward others. He was not willing to help unless he saw some material gain for it. He was demanding and ambitious and had contempt for others. All this due to his "spiritual superiority".
IMITATING GOD
Although Abraham had different ideas, which he knew were "superior" to the people who lived around him, Abraham was

generous and he was willing to help anyone in need. Abraham even asked God to spare the lives of people who were spiritually and morally inferior to him: the people of Sodoma and Gomorra. Abraham treated everyone with respect and deference, regardless of the faith they professed.
This is why Abraham had no enemies and was never judged negatively for his different beliefs. On the contrary, thanks to his excellent behavior toward others, Abraham became the inspiration for other people: Abraham is really the biggest INFLUENCER ever, who taught the world to identify the true and only God.

The Perils of Inherited Wealth

When HaShem your God brings you to the land that He promised to your parents Abraham, Isaac and Jacob … you will inherit lands with great cities that you did not build; with houses full of all kinds of good things, that you did not work for them; with wells of water that you did not dig and with vines and olive groves that you did not plant, so when you eat and feel [comfortable and] satisfied, be careful not to forget HaShem, your God, who took out of Egypt, the house bondage! «

Deut. 6: 10-12

The people of Israel are getting ready to enter the Promised Land. They will have to fight to conquer it, but HaShem promised them that He will join them in the battlefield. On the military plane, thus, success is guaranteed. “With the help of God”, literally, they will conquer the land of Israel. In speaking to the people, Moshe is not concerned with war but with peace. And more specifically for the side effects of prosperity in times of peace.

The land they are going to be given is fully functional. Jews will not be forced to spend the next few years working hard to build their cities, their walls, their houses and sow their fields. After conquering the land they will "inherit" cities that are fully operative; wells and cisterns filled with water; fields with grain ready to be collected, and trees and vineyards bearing fruit. But this, which seems to be the fulfillment of every a man's greatest dream, can become a trap from a spiritual or psychological point of view. The Tora warns the people of Israel against the phenomenon that some call "affluenza".

On June 15, 2013, 16 years old Ethan Couch, killed four people while driving intoxicated. He was indicted on four counts of manslaughter. But was not sent to prison. Instead, the Judge sentenced him to 10 years of probation and therapy after this attorney argued that Couch suffered of "affluenza", that is to say, *he didn't know boundaries because his rich parents didn't set any*, and he therefore needed rehabilitation instead of prison (this is , by the way, a great example of what Theodore Dalrymple mentions in his book: "Admirable Evasions, how psychology undermines morality". Thanks to Dr Sauly Harari for this great book!).

Those who are most exposed to contract *affluenza* are people who have everything they want "by inheritance." These privileged individuals did not need to earn their money by working hard. The great effort was made by the parents. And many parents (wrongly) believe that allowing their children to enjoy material abundance without doing enough to deserve it, is good for their children. Parents innocently think that privileged children will always display great appreciation to their benefactors and be eternally grateful to them. What's more: many parents think that since their children have received so much, and know the great feeling of being the recipient of an abundance of blessings, they will naturally learn to be generous, considerate and magnanimous with others,

imitating what their parents did for them.

But it often happens that far from having educated their sons and daughters to be grateful, kind and considerate, "giving them everything they want without demanding efforts from them" accomplishes the exact opposite effect: children become spoiled; do not appreciate or value of what they received; tend to take everything for granted and might become selfish and self centered. Moreover: many children that get used to receiving everything effort-free, do feel the need "to give" back or give to others. Rather, they are always expecting to receive more. And behave as if the entire world is there to please them, like their parents did.

This was Moshe Rabbenu's main fear. He worried that something similar could happen with the inheritance that God is giving for free to the people of Israel. They might be affected by "affluenza" and become selfish, demanding, spoiled and ungrateful. And this is why he warns us: Beware of the effects of wealth, especially inherited wealth. Never forget "WHO" gave you everything you have.

God expects two things from us:

First of all, that we learn to value what we have, and we that learn to express our appreciation permanently. So, for example, every time we enjoy or eat something we bless (= acknowledge) God before we benefit from it. Or, every time we finish eating a meal we express our thanks to God out loud and in an elaborate prayer called "Birkat haMazon." These Mitzvot / gestures will keep our sense of appreciation awake and alert.

Second, beyond appreciation HaShem also demands to behave as He does. Instruct us to "imitate His generosity" by sharing the gifts we received from Him with those who have less than us. When we give to others, we naturally learn to appreciate more what we have received and inherited from Him.

SHABBAT SHALOM