

Special Edition: Early Spring Regional Shabbaton | 3/29/16-4/2/16

The Silver Lining of
Adversity

Volume 6, Issue 13



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Inspiring the Jewish Future

This magazine was published by Midwest NCSY,
with the singular goal in mind: to highlight the fact
that while adversity is often not fun, it is gift to learn
things about yourself that you may have never
known you were capable of accomplishing.
After all...

It is your REACTION
to ADVERSITY, not
the adversity itself,
that DETERMINES
how your LIFE'S
STORY will develop.

Dieter F. Uchtdorf



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Intellectual Integrity... And the ripple effects of Abraham's adversity

By Midwest NCSY Staff



We are all familiar with peer pressure. We know what it's all about. When some of the cool kids are doing things they shouldn't be doing, they have the undesired effect of dragging other people into their struggles. And while their vices of life may not be "clinically" bad, Their friends are faced with the challenge of making the right decision. Abraham was no different. His community- even his own father- worshipped idols. Now granted, from where we sit today, idol worship seems strange. A rock, a tree, the stars- they cannot control anything. They cannot create life or destroy life. Yet, in the times of Abraham, it was the cultural norm to worship idols.

But Abraham was a curious soul. He looked at the world around him and found himself pondering the accuracy of a rock being a deity.

It just wasn't jiving. How could it be that people with rational minds believed that inanimate objects had powers? With his unique power of intellectual integrity, he discerned that of all of the deities that his community and family were worshipping were subject to ONE Creator; namely, that there was a God who created the world.

Little did he know, the adversity he was faced with and traversed at that juncture in his life would change the face of history. He is known by many as the "father of monotheism."

We live in a culture and generation where intellectual integrity is hard to come by. People glorify behaviors that defy logic, invest in things that are categorically a waste of money and time.

Before I close off, just one question: What do you worship?

Jacob's Trials and Tribulations

By Midwest NCSY Staff



Rarely do people have the challenges in life that Jacob experienced. Even in-utero, he and his brother had strife. Jacob, who was seemingly quite righteous, was loved by his mother... but his father had his sights set on Esav. Jacob spent decades running from his brother. He also spent decades working for Lavan, another mischievous character, to marry the love of his life, Rachel. On that special day, he was tricked into marrying Leah, Rachel's older sister. But he never let up. No adversity could conquer his determined will. At last, he gets the girl of his dreams.

Then, as he is building his family, His son, Joseph, the dreamy dreamer, got under his siblings skin who faked his death by saturating the Coat of Many Colors with animal blood. Jacob thought his son was gone forever. For more than 20 years, he thought his son was dead. And if that wasn't bad enough, during that entire time, he was not the

beneficiary of prophecy since happiness is a basic ingredient of receiving prophecy.

And yet, it seems that he made it. With all of the challenges that plagued him, he managed to raise his children to be the leaders of the 12 tribes that would be the very beginning of the Jewish people. Each of them had their strengths and weaknesses. But each possessed the strength of character to overcome adversity. The early years of the Jewish people were not like they are today. They were pioneers toward a future that no one had ever heard of until now.

Where would we be today without their effort, without their learned skill of traversing the threshold of adversity toward success?

One thing is likely the case: if we went through our tumultuous Jewish history without the skill of conquering adversity, things would be a lot different.

NCSY Summer Programs

One of these programs is just perfect for you. Ask your City Director for more information.



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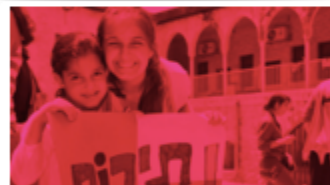
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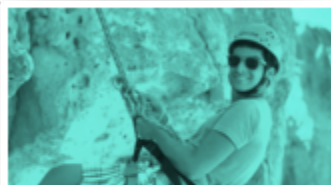
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Insights into the Haggadah

By Aish.com



Here is a selection of great Haggadah insights you can use at your Pesach Seder.

Seder Plate- An Explanation of Symbols

1. KARPAS

Karpas is a vegetable such as celery, parsley, or boiled potato. Passover is the spring festival, when we celebrate the birth of our nation. These vegetables are a symbol of rebirth and rejuvenation.

2. MARROR & CHAZERET

These are the bitter herbs, which symbolize the lot of the Hebrew slaves whose lives were embittered by the hard labor. Many people use horseradish for Marror and Romaine lettuce for Chazeret.

3. CHAROSET

Charoset reminds us of the hard labor the Jews had to perform by making bricks from mortar. Charoset is a pasty mixture of nuts, dates, apples, wine and cinnamon.

4. ZERO'AH

During the times of the Temple in Jerusalem, the Korban Pesach (Pascal Lamb) was brought to the Temple on the eve of Passover. It was roasted, and was the last thing eaten at the Seder meal. To commemorate this offering, we use a roasted meat bone with a little meat remaining.

5. BEITZAH

A second offering, called the "Chagigah," was brought to the Temple and eaten as the main course of the Seder meal. Today, instead of a

second piece of meat, we use a roasted egg -- which is traditionally a symbol of mourning -- to remind us of the destruction of the Temple. The Talmud points out that every year, the first day of Passover falls out on the same day of the week as Tisha B'Av, the day of mourning for the destruction of the Temple.

The Hungry and the Needy

All who are hungry -- come and eat. All who are needy -- come and join the Passover celebration. It's hard to believe that as you're reciting this on Passover night, any hungry, homeless people will be hanging around outside your door. So what's the point? The message is that we cannot have a relationship with God unless we care about other people -- both their physical and psychological needs. Judaism absolutely rejects self-absorbed spirituality. The Haggadah says: "All who are hungry... All who are needy..." The first one refers to physical hunger -- if you're hungry, come have a bite. The second is psychological -- if you're lonely or depressed, come join us. The purpose of the Seder is to bring us closer to God. Closeness in the physical world is measured by distance. Closeness in the spiritual realm is measured by similarity. We come closer to God by becoming more like Him. Since God provides food for all creatures and tends to all their needs, at the very beginning of the recitation of the Haggadah we issue an invitation to the poor and needy. Thus we define ourselves as givers, whether or not any poor

people rush in to accept our invitation. And don't forget: Next year invite needy guests before Passover.

The Four Questions

The Seder is centered on asking questions. The youngest child asks the Four Questions; we wash our hands before eating the karpas because it is an unusual activity which prompts the asking of questions; the Four Sons are identified by the type of questions they ask. Why are questions so important? The Maharal of Prague (16th century mystic) explains that people generally feel satisfied with their view of life. Thus they are complacent when it comes to assimilating new ideas and growing from them. A question is an admission of some lack. This creates an inner vacuum that now needs to be filled. At the Seder, we ask questions in order to open ourselves to the depth of the Exodus experience.

Got a good question? Ask it at the Seder!

The Four Sons

The Wise Son asks, "What are these statutes?" In the Torah, statutes (chukim) are laws that don't have any apparent rational reason. We do them because God asked us to, just like you might run all over town searching for purple roses because your beloved asked you to. The Seder is a service of love and connection. It connects us to God, to the other people at the table, and to the entire Jewish People. The Wise Son doesn't get lost in intellectual sophistry. He asks, "What do I need to do in order to attain this love and connection?" The Evil Son scoffs: "What's all this Passover stuff to you?" The opposite of love and connection is exclusion and distance. The Evil Son excludes himself from the Jewish People. He distances himself through ridicule, by mocking God, the Torah, and the lofty process of

the Seder itself. The Haggadah tells us to respond to him by "breaking his teeth." Teeth break down large pieces of food into smaller, digestible pieces. The Evil Son's propensity to belittle what is great and beyond his ability to digest must be checked. The third son is the Simple Son. He asks, "What is this?" "Simple" here does not mean stupid. The Simple Son is looking for God in a straightforward and direct way. According to Hasidic interpretation, "What" in his question refers to God. In whatever situation he finds himself, the Simple Son looks for God's presence. The Son Who Does Not Know How to Ask is the fourth. His apathy prevents him from asking any questions, thus sabotaging any possibility of learning and growth. In truth, every human being has a question. On Seder night, find your question within and ask it!

Slavery of the Aimless

And they oppressed us. "As it says: "They placed taskmasters over them, in order to afflict them with burdens. And for Pharaoh they built store cities named Pitom and Ramses." (Exodus 1:11) The Torah defines the redemption from Egypt as God saving us from slavery. But many other kinds of suffering characterized the Egyptian exile: torture, infanticide, enforced separation of husbands and wives, etc. In the very first of the Ten Commandments, God gives as His calling card: "I am the Lord your God, who took you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage." (Exodus 20:2) Why the emphasis on slavery rather than the other afflictions? Hebrew has two words to describe work: avodah and malacha. Maimonides explains that malacha has a finished product as its climax. Avodah describes labor without any real purpose or accomplishment. The term for a slave-eved--is a derivative of this word. A slave works for no goal

other than to satisfy his master. The Talmud teaches that the location of the store cities which the Jewish slaves built was on marsh land. No sooner did they build a layer than it sank into the marsh. The greatest anguish of their labor was that it was purposeless. When God saved us from purposeless work, He opened our eyes to the horror of a life that has no sublime purpose. Therefore, God at Sinai introduced His commandments to us with the ultimate calling card: "I am the God who removed you from the ordeal of life without purpose or meaning. Now I will show you what life is for: to come close to Me by rectifying yourself through the commandments which follow."

Miracles Today

"And God brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm and with awe and with signs and wonders." (Deut. 26:8) People often ask: "Why are there no miracles today? If I saw the signs and wonders of the Exodus, I too would believe." The Talmud tells the story of a father who puts his son on his shoulders, and carries him day and night wherever he goes. At mealtime the father reaches up his hands and feeds the boy. Quietly and consistently, the father cares for his son's every need. Then one day as they pass another traveler, the boy shouts out: "Hey, have you seen my father?" We are all prone to take God's providence for granted. In truth, miracles abound in our lives. The only difference between the miracles of the Exodus and the miracles of our immune system is frequency. A one-time miracle elicits our awe. A repeated or constant miracle elicits a yawn. Sadly, the more constant God's miracles, the more apt we are to ignore them.

Assimilation Then and Now

In each and every generation, a person is obligated to regard himself as though he actually left Egypt. The Talmud records that only 20% of the Jewish people left Egypt. The other 80% did not identify strongly enough with the Jewish people's role and goal. They were too assimilated and immersed in Egyptian society. The Haggadah is focusing us on the fact that our ancestors were among the group that had the courage and foresight to leave. It is always difficult to make changes. We may feel that we don't have the drive, stamina, and determination to make bold decisions. The Haggadah reminds us that we are part of the group that left.

The Art of Savoring

After the Afikomen, nothing else should be eaten for the remainder of the night -- except for the two remaining cups of wine. The law of the Afikomen- once it's over, it's over- is a hint to the lost spiritual art of savoring, a sensitization technique which allows us to become completely immersed in an experience. It means fine-tuning our senses to consciously engage every day and every moment; to celebrate life and to imbibe the totality of every experiential step we take. Upon concluding the Seder, Jewish law bids us not to taste anything after the Afikomen. This is a night for savoring: ideas, feelings, and images. Parents teaching, children learning, and all of us growing together. Allow it to become a part of you. Savor this night of connection and freedom. Only then can you leave. Not with souvenirs, not with photos, but as a different person. A different Jew. And this you will never forget.

Brotherly Love...

Well, Sort Of

by Midwest NCSY Staff



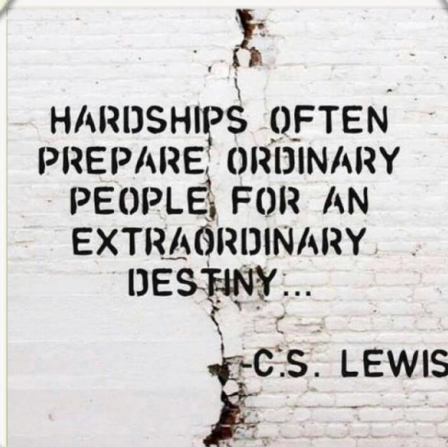
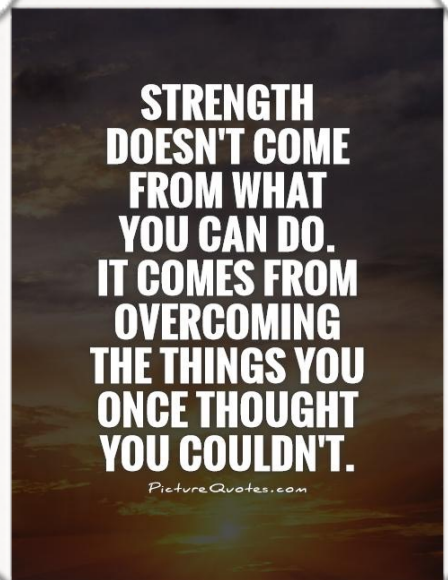
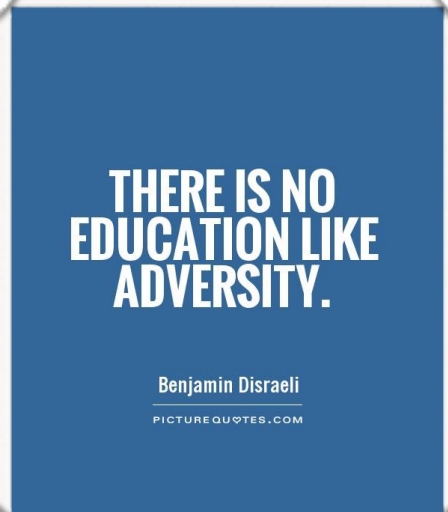
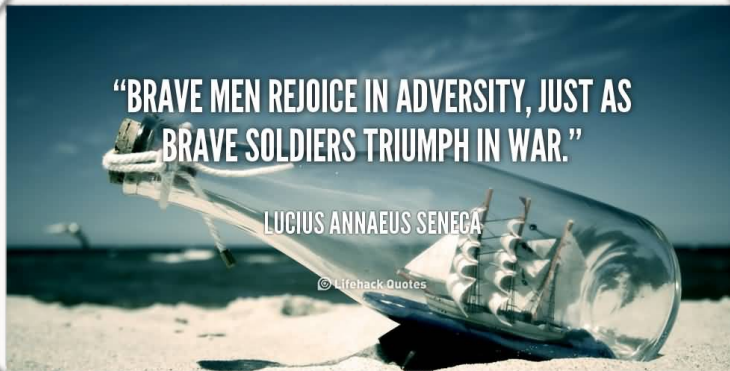
If you have siblings, you can probably relate to that feeling when the little one gets his way. Well, in the case of Joseph, it was most definitely true. Our Torah says, *"VeYisrael ahav es Yosef mikiol banim*, and Yisrael loved Yosef from all his sons". The tension was palpable. At 17, he told his brothers of a dream where he would soon rule over them. At the end of their rope, the brothers couldn't take it anymore and threw him into a pit; only to soon sell him into slavery. Then, he managed to get himself in prison. In a strange turn of events, Joseph was catapulted into the king's palace after making some connections while in jail; only to be seduced- daily- by the king's wife. An all out temptress, he withstood the temptation. In fact, the Midrash tells us that she had her servants tie down Joseph and placed a metal brace around his neck with a sharp point right under his chin. You know the end of the story. He succeeded. In Tehilim

105, it says, *"He had the power to impress the highest ranking officials and was able to outsmart even their wisest men."* But his values withstood the test of a lifetime.

Whatever Yosef set his mind to, he accomplished, despite the obstacles standing in his way. He could have given up and dropped his morals in the palace as the king's wife tried to seduce him. After all, he was just thrown into a pit, sold into slavery, and spent a significant amount of time in jail. But his determination never faltered. Yosef made sure to be true to himself and his beliefs, and throughout all of his adversity, it was Yosef's determination which enabled him to overcome it all.

Determination is something that we can cultivate. It is something to which we hold the keys. The only question to be asked is: are we willing to work for it? I hope the answer is a resounding "Yes".

QuOTABLE QuOTES!



Tear me out. Keep me somewhere SPECIAL... BECAUSE I KNOW THAT I WILL NEED HELP TO GET THROUGH MY CHALLENGES.



- I. **Intellectual integrity:** make sure you can see the true reality of the circumstance. If you cannot, then you won't navigate the adversity well. Avraham is our role model for this.
- II. **Determination:** look no further than Yaakov and Yosef. Their lives were riddled with adversity. They each made it through with tenacity and determination.
- III. **Plan:** once the adversity hits, come up with a plan for how you will navigate the challenge. Yosef had a sophisticated plan to prepare for the famine in Egypt. It was due to him that the country made it through the crisis.
- IV. **Ask for help:** when we hit moments of challenge and adversity, we have Someone who can help us more than others. That Someone is Hashem. Ask Him for help. He's got some serious love for you.
- V. **Quotable Quotes:** on the back of this page is reminders of the value of being able to tackle challenges.

Cut on the dotted line. Save more frequent moments of adversity.

Let's see some sources in our Torah!

ENGAGING THE TEXT

Struggles: What's the Point?

רמב"ן בראשית פרק כב פסוק א

והאלהים נסה את אברהם - ענין הנסיון הוא לדעת, בעבור היות מעשה האדם רשות מוחלטת בידו, אם ירצה יעשה ואם לא ירצה לא יעשה, יקרא "נסיון" מצד המנוסה, אבל המנסה יתברך יצוה בו להוציא הדבר מן הכח אל הפועל, להיות לו שכר מעשה טוב לא שכר לב טוב בלבד. ודע כי "השם צדיק יבחן" (תהלים יא ה), כשהוא יודע בצדיק שיעשה רצונו וחפץ להצדיקו יצוה אותו בנסיון, ולא יבחן את הרשעים אשר לא ישמעו. והנה כל הנסיונות שבתורה לטובת המנוסה:

Ramban: Beraishis 22:1

The matter of "trial," in my opinion, is as follows: since a man's deeds are at his absolute free command, to perform them or not to perform them at his will, on the part of the one who is tried it is called a "trial." But on the part of G-d, who tries the person, it is a command that the one being tested should bring forth the matter from potential into actuality so that he may be rewarded for a good deed, not for a good thought alone.

Furthermore, G-d only tests the righteous. He does so knowing that the righteous will do His will and therefore tests him in order to make him more upright. G-d does not test the wicked because he knows they will not obey. Thus all trials in the Torah are for the good of the one who is being tried.

Questions to Consider

- ▶ According the Ramban, what is the purpose of divine tests?
- ▶ How do tests help us reach our potential?

ENGAGING THE TEXT

Words of Consolation to a Struggling Student

משלי פרק כד פסוק טז

כי שבע יפול צדיק וקם ורשעים יכשלו ברעה:

Mishlei 24:16

For a righteous man can fall seven times and rise, but the wicked shall stumble upon evil.

פחד יצחק אגרות וכתובים ס' קכח

רעה חולה היא אצלנו שכאשר מתעסקים אנו בצדדי השלימות של גדולינו, הננו מטפלים בסיכום האחרון של מעלתם. מספרים אנו על דרכי השלימות שלהם, בשעה שאנחנו מדלגים על המאבק הפנימי שהתחולל בנפשם... אבל דע לך חביבי ששורש נשמתך הוא לא השלוח של היצר טוב אלא דוקא מלחמתו של היצר טוב.

ומכתבך היקר הנלבב מעיד כמאה עדים כי אכן לוחם נאמן... באנגלית אומרים "Lose a battle and win the war" ... החכם מכל אדם אמר "שבע יפול צדיק וקם." והטפשים חושבים כי כונתו בדרך רבותא. אע"פ ששבע יפול צדיק מ"מ הוא קם. אבל החכמים יודעים היטב שהכונה היא

שמהות הקימה של הצדיק היא דרך ה"שבע נפילות" שלו.

Pachad Yitzchak - Collected Letters #128

There is a common misconception in our midst regarding our attitude to the appreciation of our great individuals. We tend to focus on their current elevated status, neglecting to recall the many mistakes and hardships they encountered on their path to greatness. ...But know this, my beloved, the root of your soul is not found within the serenity of your desire to be good, rather it is specifically in the struggle to become good. And your precious letter, testifies like a thousand witnesses that you are, indeed, struggling faithfully...In English there is a saying, "Lose a battle and win the war." King Solomon wrote, "A righteous person falls seven times, yet rises again" (Mishlei/Proverbs 24:16). The uninformed assume the meaning to be that greatness can be achieved despite experiencing an occasional stumble; however, the wise know well that the verse's intention is to instruct us that the very path to greatness is solely attained by encountering obstacles and then overcoming them.

Questions to Consider

- ▶ Rav Hutner mentions a common misconception we have about great individuals. Have you ever held similar misconceptions?
- ▶ "Lose a battle and win the war": What's the meaning of this phrase and how can it apply to our confrontation with failure?
- ▶ How does Rav Hutner reinterpret the verse "A righteous person falls seven times, yet rises again"? Have you ever experienced this in your own life?

**MIDWEST NCSY'S SPRING REGIONAL SHABBATON IN
CAMP CHI WILL BE FROM MAY 26-30, 2016.
NOT THE KIND OF THING YOU WANT TO MISS...**

