

Even In Auschwitz

BY DON JARASHOW

In today's world, we wake up to headlines that are frightening and uncertain: war, political upheaval, natural disasters, economic instability. It can feel like the ground beneath us is shifting, like everything we depend on might be taken away. How do we respond when life becomes unpredictable? Where do we place our trust? How do we get through?

FAITH IN DARKNESS

A friend once shared this story with me:

There was a Polish Yid who lived a full, beautiful life. He had a wife, children, parnassah, everything in place. Life was good. Then the Germans invaded, and almost overnight he realized that everything he had built was about to be taken from him. The shift from comfort and stability to terror was overwhelming. But he was a *baal bitachon*, a chassid who worked hard to hold onto perspective as everything unraveled.

First, they destroyed his business. He told himself, my parnassah is gone, everything I built is gone, but at least I still have my family and my home. Then they emptied his house. Again he reframed. At least we had warning. At least we packed one suitcase. At least I still have my family. Then they took the suitcases. Still, he told himself, at least I still have my wife and children.

And then they took his family.

At that point, he felt finished. He had recalibrated again and again, but now there was nothing left. As people were lined up to be sent to Auschwitz, he stood there stripped of everything. No business. No home. No possessions. No wife. No children.

He asked himself one final question: Is there anything left at all? Anything worth living for? Why continue when there is nothing to hold on to?

He stood there for about half an hour, empty and broken, watching people sent right and left and knowing what awaited them. In

that half hour, in the darkest place on earth, something stirred. Some small reserve of resolve. And suddenly, with a clarity he had never known before, he realized:

I still have Hashem.

The war ended. He survived. He rebuilt. He moved to Tel Aviv, remarried, built a new family, rebuilt his parnassah, and became successful again. From the outside, his life looked complete. Yet for years he said something shocking.

"I wish I could go back to that half hour in Auschwitz. Not because of the pain, but because it was the clearest moment of my life. When I had nothing. When it was just me and Hashem. And no one could take that away. That was when I felt richest. Closest."

Because when you have Hashem, you have everything. Even in Auschwitz.

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"WHO ARE THESE?"

When Yaakov saw Yosef's sons, he asked (*Bereishis* 48:8-10), "Who are these?" Yosef replied, "בני הם אשר נתן לי אלקים בזה" — *they are my sons, whom G-d has given me here.*" Then Yaakov said, "קחם נא אלי" — *bring them to me, that I may bless them.*"

At first glance, this seems straightforward. Yaakov simply wanted to know who these boys were, and Yosef answered. Yet Rashi reveals a deeper tension beneath the text.

When Yaakov saw Yosef's sons, he wasn't merely asking their identity. Rashi explains: לפי שעתיד ירבעם, לפי שעתיד ירבעם, לפי שעתיד ירבעם, לפי שעתיד ירבעם, לפי שעתיד ירבעם. ואחאב לצאת מאפרים ויהוא ובני ממנשה. *Yaakov wanted to bless them,*

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but the Divine Presence would depart from him because in the future Yeravam and Abav would arise from Ephraim, and Yehu and his descendants from Menasheh.

Thus, Yaakov pressed, “מי אלה?” Rashi comments: מהיכן יצאו אלו, שאינן ראויין לברכה. He was questioning their worthiness in light of the future evil that would emerge from their tribes. The sons themselves had not sinned, yet history already weighed upon them.

Yosef, ever aware of the importance of his father’s blessing before he passed, הראה לו שטר אירוסין ושטר כתובה ובקש רחמים על הדבר, ונחה. Yosef showed Yaakov his *shtar erusin* and *shtar kesubah*, and prayed for mercy concerning his children. At that moment, the Divine Spirit returned and rested upon Yaakov, allowing him to bless them.

But the lingering question remains. The *meforshim* ask: Even after Yosef showed the *shtar erusin* and *shtar kesubah*, Yaakov’s main concern seemingly remained unresolved. His hesitation was not about legitimacy. It was about the future. He saw that from these very tribes would one day emerge evil. Granted, the children were born בכשרות, but how does that address what Yaakov saw ahead? How could documents overcome a prophetic concern?

THE POWER OF “HERE”

Elucidating on an approach found in Rav Yaakov Galinsky, as well as in Mivchar Amarim in the name of the Avnei Chen, the answer lies in one word: בזה.

Yes, Yosef showed the *shtar erusin* and *shtar kesubah* as proof that everything was done properly. But בזה means far more than paperwork. As the Sefer Be’er Mayim Chaim explains, the word בזה refers to something tangible, something one can literally point to with a finger.

Yosef pointed to the documents, but he also pointed to בזה. To this. To here. To Mitzrayim. Yosef was saying: With this, here, in this very place, in this darkness, in this spiritually hostile environment, this is where I raised my children.

Look at my brothers, Yosef was telling his father. Look at the other ten tribes. They grew up in your home, surrounded by *kedushah*, clarity, and stability. I was placed here, בזה, in Mitzrayim, in isolation, temptation, and constant pressure. This is where Hashem put me. I am not in control of the setting. I am only responsible for what I do within it. I do not understand the darkness. But לכתך, I will keep going. I will remain faithful. I will build here.

Hashem does not judge us by perfect conditions. He judges us by what we do with the conditions we are given. How perfect and wholesome we strive to serve Him, regardless of the conditions. Sometimes, it is precisely the difficulty of the situation that allows for greater growth than comfort ever could. It is not about being in the perfect place. It is about being faithful in the place we are placed.

That is what I am showing you, Yosef was saying. Not merely producing documents to prove that everything is כשר, but reminding you that Hashem accounts for circumstance as well.

And in conclusion, all of this is in one word, בזה, Yosef said. The future may hold darkness. Wickedness may yet emerge from my offspring. But what counts is the present. This is where I raised my children. This is where I stood firm, with my head held high, despite every reason to give up.

And this is what answered Yaakov’s concern. Yaakov’s hesitation was not about documents or details. It came from what he saw ahead. He sensed the future, and that awareness made it hard for him to act in the present.

Yosef didn’t argue about the future. He was redefining the standard. He was teaching what it means to be a *kli kibul*, a vessel fit to receive blessing. Blessing is not a guarantee of outcomes. It is about the present, what stands before us, what needs assistance, healing, direction, and success, truth.

Once Yaakov saw that, once he saw goodness that emerged here, under these conditions, the future no longer blocked the present. The Shechinah could rest again, and the blessing could be given. That is the power of בזה.

Blessing, perspective, and resilience are not about perfect conditions or predicting the future. They are about presence, about faithfulness in the place we are given, even when circumstances are dark, frightening, or uncertain. Just as the Yid in Auschwitz discovered clarity, richness, and connection to Hashem when stripped of everything, he even wanted to relive that half hour years later. How? Why? What did he want?

The answer is that Yosef showed Yaakov that integrity, growth, and goodness can emerge even in the harshest environments. It’s about the now, working within the circumstances to make them as perfect as possible, not about being in perfect circumstances.

The future may hold challenges, the world may shift beyond our control, but בזה—here, in this place, in this moment—is where we live, where we act, and where Hashem judges our truth. This is what made Yosef’s children worthy of blessing, and this is what allows us to stand strong in our own lives. It is not about waiting for the ideal conditions. It is about rising to the challenge of the present and finding meaning, faith, and light in the reality we have been given. Even in Egypt. Even in Auschwitz. Certainly, wherever we are. •

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