

## Vayehi 5786

It's all good . . . or is it?

- Is everything really for the good? (Sometimes, even lying?)
- How are you doing on your New Years' resolutions? (Including those from 3 months ago?)
- What does a real apology look like?

50:1-20 - the death of the patriarch

### 1) Bereshit Rabbah 100:8

**“Joseph returned to Egypt, he, and his brothers, and everyone who went up with him to bury his father, after he buried his father. Joseph's brothers saw that their father had died, and they said: Perhaps Joseph will hate us, and will repay us for all the evil that we did to him” (Genesis 50:14-15).**

“Joseph returned to Egypt...” Rabbi Levi and Rabbi Yitzhak, said: It is because he did not invite them to the meal. Rabbi Tanhuma said: His intention was only for the sake of Heaven. He said: ‘In the past, father would seat me above Judah, who is king, and above Reuben, who is firstborn. Now, it is improper for me to sit above them.’ But that is not what they said, but rather: “Perhaps Joseph will hate us.” Rabbi Yitzhak said: He went and peered into that pit. Rabbi Tanhuma said: His intention was only for the sake of Heaven. But that is not what they said, but rather: “Perhaps Joseph will hate us.”

**2) “They instructed to tell Joseph, saying: Your father instructed before his death, saying, so say to Joseph: Please, forgive the transgression of your brothers and their sin as they did evil to you. And now, please forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father. Joseph wept as they spoke to him” (Genesis 50:16–17).**

“They instructed to tell Joseph, saying: Your father instructed...” It is taught: Rabbi Shimon ben Gamliel says: Great is peace, as even the tribes spoke fabricated matters in order to impose peace between Joseph and the tribes. That is what is written: “They instructed to tell Joseph, saying...” Where did he instruct? We do not find that he instructed.

“So say to Joseph...[Joseph wept as they spoke to him]” – he said: ‘This is how my brothers are suspicious of me?’

3) **“His brothers too, went and fell before him and they said: Behold, we are your slaves” (Genesis 50:18).**

“His brothers too, went” – you wanted one of us as a slave, here all of us are your slaves.

4) 50:15 - **hizkuni**: they said: “perhaps Joseph will hate us.” When the brothers had returned from burying their father in Canaan, Joseph passed the pit into which the brothers had thrown him and recited the blessing: “the God Who has performed a miracle for me at this place.” When the brothers heard this they became afraid that old animosities might flare up again.

5) **Rashi**: AND WHEN JOSEPH S BRETHREN SAW THAT THEIR FATHER WAS DEAD — What is the meaning of “and they saw”? They could perceive that he was dead through the conduct of Joseph. Previously they used to dine at Joseph’s table and he used to receive them with open arms out of respect to his father; after Jacob’s death, however, he no longer treated them in a friendly manner (Tanchuma Yashan 2:1:2; Genesis Rabbah 100:8).

6) **Rashi 50:16** - THY FATHER DID COMMAND — They altered the facts (they stated something that was false) for the sake of peace, for Jacob had given them no such command because Joseph was not suspect in his sight (Yevamot 65b)).

7) **Hizkuni**: according to the Jerusalem Targum they instructed the sons of Bilhah to tell Joseph in the name of their father that he had said before being gathered in to tell Joseph etc. etc.,”

8) **Rashi 50:17** - NOW, PRAY, FORGIVE THE TRESSPASS OF THE SERVANTS OF THE GOD OF THY FATHER — After having repeated to Joseph the words which his brothers stated had been their fathers message, “forgive thy brothers’ sin” the messengers were to add as a petition of the brothers “Now, pray etc.”, meaning “If you will not forgive them although they are your brothers, forgive them because they are the servants of the God of thy father”, implying though your father be dead, his God still lives and they are his servants.

9) **Julie Corliss, Executive Editor, *Harvard Heart Letter***: According to the late psychiatrist Dr. Aaron Lazare, an apology expert and former chancellor and

dean of the University of Massachusetts Medical School, a good apology has four elements:

- Acknowledge the offense. Take responsibility for the offense, whether it was a physical or psychological harm, and confirm that your behavior was not acceptable. Avoid using vague or evasive language, or wording an apology in a way that minimizes the offense or questions whether the victim was really hurt.
- Explain what happened. The challenge here is to explain how the offense occurred without excusing it. In fact, sometimes the best strategy is to say there is no excuse.
- Express remorse. If you regret the error or feel ashamed or humiliated, say so: this is all part of expressing sincere remorse.
- Offer to make amends. For example, if you have damaged someone's property, have it repaired or replace it. When the offense has hurt someone's feelings, acknowledge the pain and promise to try to be more sensitive in the future.

### Making a heartfelt apology

The words you choose for your apology count. Here are some examples of good and bad apologies.

EFFECTIVE WORDING	WHY IT WORKS
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<p>"I'm sorry I lost my temper last night. I've been under a lot of pressure at work, but that's no excuse for my behavior. I love you and will try harder not to take my frustrations out on you."</p>	<p>Takes responsibility, explains but does not excuse why the mistake happened, expresses remorse and caring, and promises reparation.</p>
<p>"I forgot. I apologize for this mistake. It shouldn't have happened. What can I do to avoid this problem in the future?"</p>	<p>Takes responsibility, describes the mistake, makes the person feel cared for, and begins a conversation about how to remedy the error.</p>
<p>INEFFECTIVE WORDING</p>	<p>WHY IT WON'T WORK</p>
<p>"I apologize for whatever happened."</p>	<p>Language is vague; offense isn't specified.</p>
<p>"Mistakes were made."</p>	<p>Use of passive voice avoids taking responsibility.</p>
<p>"Okay, I apologize. I didn't know this was such a sensitive issue for you."</p>	<p>Sounds grudging, thrusts the blame back on to the offended person (for "sensitivity").</p>

After Jacob dies, the brothers come before Joseph and explicitly allude to their wrongdoing, asking for Yosef's forgiveness. They do so first in Jacob's name, and then, subtly, in their own:

**בראשית נ:יז**

אָנָּא שָׂא נָא פֶּשַׁע אֶחָיִךְ וְחַטָּאתָם כִּי־רָעָה גָּמְלוּךְ וְעַתָּה שָׂא נָא לְפָשַׁע עֲבָדֶי  
אֱלֹהֵי אָבִיךָ

**Genesis 50:17**

“[Jacob:] ‘Please forgive the sin of your brothers and their guilt, for they dealt you ill.’ [Brothers:] But now, forgive the sin of the servants of the God of your father.”

- What is good about their apology?
- What does it lack?
- How does Joseph respond?
- Is this true forgiveness?

**10) In a chapter all about compensating a victim for personal injury;**

**Mishnah (Bava Kama 8:7)**

**Despite** the fact **that** the assailant who caused damage **gives to** the victim all of the required payments for the injury, his transgression is **not forgiven for him** in the heavenly court **until he requests** forgiveness **from** the victim, **as it is stated** that God told Abimelech after he had taken Sarah from Abraham: “**Now therefore restore the wife** of the man; for he is a prophet, and he shall pray for you, and you shall live” (Genesis 20:7). **And from where** is it derived **that if** the victim **does not forgive him that he is cruel? As it is stated: “And Abraham prayed to God; and God healed Abimelech,** and his wife, and his maidservants; and they bore children” (Genesis 20:17).

**11) Genesis 20:9-19**

- Is this a true apology? Is it ideal?

12) **Tosefta (Lieberman) Bava Kama 9:29:** Rabbi Yehuda said, "From the name of Rabban Gamliel, he said, 'And He gave you mercy, and your mercy, and your increase, etc.' This will be a sign to you as long as you are merciful, that the Merciful One has mercy on you."

- What if prayer is actually critical in the inner work of real conflict transformation?

### **Rabbi Gamzu**

12) **Taanit 21a:11-14 - And why did they call him Naḥum of Gam Zu?** The reason is **that** with regard to **any matter that occurred to him, he would say: This too is for the good [*gam zu letova*].** Once, the Jews wished to send a gift [*doron*] to the house of the emperor. They said: Who should go and present this gift? Let Naḥum of Gam Zu go, as he is accustomed to miracles. They sent with him a chest [*sifta*] full of jewels and pearls, and he went and spent the night in a certain inn. During the night, these residents of the inn arose and took all of the precious jewels and pearls from the chest, and filled it with earth. The next day, when he saw what had happened, Naḥum of Gam Zu said: This too is for the good. When he arrived there, at the ruler's palace, they opened the chest and saw that it was filled with earth. The king wished to put all the Jewish emissaries to death. He said: The Jews are mocking me. Naḥum of Gam Zu said: This too is for the good. Elijah the Prophet came and appeared before the ruler as one of his ministers. He said to the ruler: Perhaps this earth is from the earth of their father Abraham. As when he threw earth, it turned into swords, and when he threw stubble, it turned into arrows, as it is written in a prophecy that the Sages interpreted this verse as a reference to Abraham: "His sword makes them as the dust, his bow as the driven stubble" (Isaiah 41:2). There was one province that the Romans were unable to conquer. They took some of this earth, tested it by throwing it at their enemies, and conquered that province. When the ruler saw that this earth indeed had miraculous powers, his servants entered his treasury and filled Naḥum of Gam Zu's chest with precious jewels and pearls and sent him off with great honor. When Naḥum of Gam Zu came to spend the night at that same inn, the residents said to him: What did you bring with you to the emperor that he bestowed upon you such great

**honor? He said to them: That which I took from here, I brought there.** When they heard this, the residents of the inn thought that the soil upon which their house stood had miraculous powers. **They tore down their inn and brought the soil underneath to the king's palace. They said to him: That earth that was brought here was from our property.** The miracle had been performed only in the merit of Naḥum of Gam Zu. The emperor **tested** the inn's soil in battle, **and it was not found** to have miraculous powers, **and he had these residents of the inn put to death.**

13) But also . . . **Taanit 21a:8-10:** **They said about Naḥum of Gam Zu that he was blind in both eyes, both his arms were amputated, both his legs were amputated, and his entire body was covered in boils. And he was lying in a dilapidated house, and legs of his bed were placed in buckets of water so that ants should not climb onto him, as he was unable to keep them off in any other manner. Once his students sought to remove his bed from the house and afterward remove his other vessels. He said to them: My sons, remove the vessels first, and afterward remove my bed, as I can guarantee you that as long as I am in the house, the house will not fall. Indeed they removed the vessels and afterward they removed his bed, and immediately the house collapsed. His students said to him: Rabbi, since you are evidently a wholly righteous man, as we have just seen that as long as you were in your house it did not fall, why has this suffering befallen you? He said to them: My sons, I brought it upon myself. Naḥum of Gam Zu related to them the following: As once I was traveling along the road to my father-in-law's house, and I had with me a load distributed among three donkeys, one of food, one of drink, and one of delicacies. A poor person came and stood before me in the road, saying: My rabbi, sustain me. I said to him: Wait until I unload the donkey, after which I will give you something to eat. However, I had not managed to unload the donkey before his soul left his body. I went and fell upon his face and said: May my eyes, which had no compassion on your eyes, be blinded; may my hands, which had no compassion on your hands, be amputated; may my legs, which had no compassion on your legs, be amputated. And my mind did not rest until I said: May my whole body be covered in boils. Naḥum of Gam Zu prayed that his suffering might atone for his failure. His students said to him:**

Even so, **woe to us that we have seen you in this** state. **He said to them: Woe is me if you had not seen me in this** state, as this suffering atones for me.