ELEMENTS OF RESILIENCE

There is no one "right" way to respond to a traumatic event and most people deal with trauma in slightly different ways. Yet, there is research that indicates that certain environments, perspectives and behaviors lead to more adaptive responses that create the opportunity for healing. Yosef, a survivor of several traumatic events, serves as a paradigm of resilience. By analyzing Yosef's mindset and behavior as presented in the *pesukim* and *midrashim* at the end of *Sefer Bereishit*, we can identify several strategies that serve as protective factors for healthy resolutions of traumatic events.

The natural response to trauma is to try and avoid the painfulness of the experience. Yet, research indicates that the more one tries to avoid either by trying to not think about the traumatic event or by distancing oneself from anything that reminds one of the event, the greater likelihood one has of developing post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Consequently, besides for being able to talk about the painful experience, one of the strategies in trauma-focused cognitive behavioral therapy (TF-CBT) is to revisit the site of the trauma. One of the reasons why this is helpful is because it helps the person develop a "then versus now" perspective, allowing the event to feel more in the past, rather than something that is continuing to be experienced in the present.

There is a fascinating group of *midrashim* that suggest that on the way back from burying Yaakov, Yosef took a detour to revisit the scene of his original trauma – the infamous pit where his brothers left him to die. Standing over the pit, gazing into the abyss, he confronts the site of the trauma. At that moment, he recites a *bracha*: "Blessed is G-d ('*HaMakom*') Who performed a miracle for me in this place ('*bamakom hazeh*'). This *bracha* reflects and reveals two important mindsets. First, as is indicated by the past grammatical tense, the *bracha* presupposes a break from the past. By being able to acknowledge being saved *in the past*, Yosef solidifies a "then versus now" perspective.

The *bracha* also demonstrates a second important protective factor for Yosef – the ability to find positive meaning in the trauma. Broadly speaking, the *bracha* serves to spiritualize and sanctify the experience. More specifically, hinted at within the wording of the *bracha* is a powerful message. The word used to connote G-d in the blessing is "*HaMakom*," literally, "The Place" - "Blessed is *The Place*, Who performed a miracle for me at *this place*." Embedded within the wording, Yosef is acknowledging what he explicitly states within the *pesukim*. The whole narrative, starting with the trauma that happened at *this place*, reflects the Will of *The Place*. Yosef acknowledges the positive meaning within the trauma: G-d orchestrated each element of the story for the survival of the descendants of Yaakov in Egypt.

Finally, the story closes with Yosef demonstrating one more protective factor, namely, helping others in their healing process. Yosef's brothers were scared that Yosef would seek out retribution now that Yaakov died, and Yosef was in a position of power. Yosef doesn't just reassure them that he won't harm them and that he will provide sustenance for them, but he also "comforted them and spoke to their hearts" (*Bereishit* 50:21). Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch suggests that Yosef was helping them with their healing process by trying to assuage their feelings of guilt by emphasizing the Divinely ordained elements of what transpired and the positive outcomes of everyone now having enough food to survive.

While we hope to not experience traumatic events in the first place, if we are confronted with a trauma, we can learn a number of powerful strategies from Yosef, including; revisiting the scene in a safe context to foster a "then versus now" perspective, finding meaning and positive benefit within the event, and helping others heal through their own healing process.

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