

The Secret of Jewish Success

Category: Bereishis, Vayeshev

Who was the first person to declare, "Baruch Hashem"? What does that statement contribute to your character?

Teaching the Doctors

Fourteen years ago, a group of yeshivah students in New York were crossing the Brooklyn Bridge when they suddenly came under fire from a Palestinian terrorist.

Two were struck in the head and immediately rushed to hospital. Tragically, one died after several days. The other lay unconscious for several weeks, and then miraculously recovered.

By the time he left the hospital, all the non-Jewish doctors and nurses knew two words in Hebrew (can you guess what they were?): Boruch Hashem.

Whenever the victim's mother was asked how her son was doing, she'd reply, "Boruch Hashem," and so eventually, the entire staff soon came around to saying "bruk hashem!" Jews are always saying "Boruch Hashem," which means "Thank G-d," or "B'ezras Hashem"—with G-d's help. They write the Hebrew letters beis and hei when they start writing on a paper, which stands for "Boruch Hashem."

There's another expression that some people might recognize: "Im yirtzeh Hashem"—"G-d willing," as in: "I'll come by tomorrow to visit, im yirtzeh Hashem."

The Baal Shem Tov's Passion

The story is told of the Baal Shem Tov that before he became well known, he would travel from city to city and town to town all across Eastern Europe and ask his fellow Jews, men and women, young and old alike, "How are you?" "How's business?" "How's your health?" and he would delight in hearing them respond, "Boruch Hashem," or "Thank G-d, everything's fine!" and other such expressions of thanks and praise to the Creator.

The Baal Shem Tov would say that G-d greatly enjoyed these Jewish expressions of praise.

How Did Potiphar Know?

But where does the expression “Boruch Hashem” come from? Who originated it?

In our Torah portion this week, we read the famous saga of the great Yosef, how he was sold as a slave by his own brothers and sent down to Egypt.

There, we read, “G-d was with Yosef and he became a successful man.”

Yosef was successful in everything he did, so much so that right after we read that “he became a successful man” we read, “his master saw that G-d was with him and that everything he does, G-d makes it succeed in his hand.”

The Rebbe asks: How did Potiphar (Yosef’s master) know that G-d was the reason for Yosef’s success?

Potiphar was a minister in the Pharaoh’s court. He certainly worshipped idols, as did all Egyptians then. If so, how did Potiphar, of all people, know to chalk up Yosef’s success to his relationship with G-d? Seemingly, he should have attributed it to the idols of Egypt.

Furthermore, after hundreds of years of Jews living in Egypt, when Moshe came before the Pharaoh and declared, “Thus says Hashem, the G-d of Israel: ‘Send forth My People,’” the Pharaoh answered him: “I do not know Hashem”—he did not recognize a god impossible to physically feel or touch.

If Pharaoh did not know G-d, then certainly Potiphar did not learn about G-d from the only Jew in Egypt—a 17-year-old lad—while the rest of the country was steeped in idol worship.

Yosef’s Passion

Rashi answers the question: “the name of Heaven was secure in Yosef’s mouth.”

Now, how did Rashi know that Yosef basically went around all day saying “Boruch Hashem”? As we continue reading the Torah portion, it is revealed that in every

conversation Yosef had in Egypt that the Torah tells us about, he mentions G-d.

The first time we hear Yosef's voice in Egypt is with the incident with Potiphar's wife, when Yosef refused her advances in saying, "I shall have sinned to G-d."

The second time is when he speaks with the Egyptian royal court members: the chief butler and the chief baker, offering to interpret their dreams by saying, "G-d has answers"—again he mentions G-d.

And at the beginning of the Torah portion of Mikeitz, when we find Yosef standing before the Pharaoh, the ruler of all, at the moment that will decide his entire fate—slavery or freedom at the hands of the ruler—what does he say? "... G-d will tell the Pharaoh's welfare."

We thus find that in every dialogue, Yosef mentions G-d. So it's no wonder, then, that Potiphar knew that "G-d was with him."

Yosef took pains to convey that he knew that everything comes from G-d, which is why he would say "Boruch Hashem" and "B'ezras Hashem" all day.

The Power to Forgive

This explains yet another amazing thing that happened to Yosef.

In the Torah portion of Vayigash, when Yosef finally reveals himself to his brothers and says to them, "I am Yosef!", he not only does not attempt revenge against them but quite the opposite: he forgives them wholeheartedly, and more than that: he repays their evil with good.

Where did Yosef get the spiritual strength to forgive his brothers for selling him as a slave? Yosef himself provided the answer: "And now, it was not you who sent me here but G-d."

Only a Jew whose every day is permeated with the belief that everything that happens is "b'ezras Hashem," with G-d's help, and by divine providence, can find the spiritual power to forgive such a grave matter.

The First Baruch Hashem

Where did Yosef learn this behavior? From his father.

We read in Parshas Toldos how Yaakov appeared before Yitzchok disguised as his brother Esav. Yitzchok suspected that it wasn't Esav but rather, someone else. Why so? Because Yaakov thanked G-d for finding the delicacies that Yitzchok enjoyed. Rashi says that Yitzchok thought to himself, "Esav is not accustomed to mention G-d."

Clearly, this was Yaakov's habit. And apparently, he was the one who started it; we don't find any such talk with the earlier Patriarchs.

Attribute Your Success

We frequently hear how successful people are asked, "What's the secret of your success?"

Some will say, "Hard work," or "studying"—each one produces another reason for their success.

The first success story we read about in the Torah is the story of Yosef: "And he became a successful man."

What was his secret of success? That he attributed his success to G-d.

A Jew must always recognize that his success is in G-d's merit and that he cannot not do it alone. When he says "Boruch Hashem" for everything he has, and knows that everything he plans to do will only happen "im yirtzeh Hashem," if G-d wants, then G-d blesses him with success in all the work of his hands.

That is the true secret of Jewish success.