

March 8th

Genesis 41:48 – “And he gathered up all the food of the seven years which were in the land of Egypt, and laid up the food in the cities; the food of the field, which was round about every city, laid he up in the same.”

There's a fascinating subtext to this verse that might inspire us in our recovery. Though the basic story is obvious – in a time of plenty, Joseph organizes a program to store excess grain – we should also reflect on the idea that the good was “round about every city.” The food was around, of course, but it took Joseph to ensure it was used wisely and not wasted. This can be a good lesson for saving money, and so on, but in recovery terms, we can also look at it as a metaphor for the good things that the program has to offer. They are all around us, like the food of the field, yet so many of us fail to “gather it in” and store it for lean times. We should try to look for morsels of recovery that we can save for later – wise words, ideas, cool stories of recovery, and so on. And, like the Egyptians in the Joseph story, we can be guided by the leaders of the program to help us in our storage efforts.

March 9th

Genesis 42:1 – “Now Jacob saw that there was corn in Egypt, and Jacob said unto his sons: ‘Why do ye look one upon another?’”

The translation of this verse varies, with some texts rendering Jacob’s question to his sons as, “Why do you make yourselves conspicuous?” — i.e., why do you show off that you have food and goods in this time of great famine? Jacob goes through many great trials in his life, yet he never questions the wisdom of God. We, too, could emulate this behavior in what we perceive to be our own struggles. Beyond this, though, there is a great insight we can gain from Jacob’s admonition of his sons. He understood that it is never wise to display wealth in a way that might make others envious. So much of addiction and bad recovery flows from envy, comparing oneself with others, and coveting that which others have. If we can tone down our own displays, and work on our own perceptions of others – not judging “your insides but their outsides,” as the program saying goes – we can help our own recovery a great deal.

March 10th

Genesis 42:5 –42:6 - “And the sons of Israel came to buy among those that came; for the famine was in the land of Canaan. And Joseph was the governor over the land; he it was that sold to all the people of the land. And Joseph's brethren came, and bowed down to him with their faces to the earth. ”

In today's vernacular, this is “payback time” for Joseph. His brothers, who once wanted him dead and sold him into slavery, are now completely at his mercy. How does Joseph handle this situation? He does play tricks on his brothers, and makes them undergo stressful and painful experiences – but not for revenge, but rather to encourage them to repent for their past wrongs. His behavior can serve as a model for us in recovery. He is not acting out of ego or self-will, which would in fact be entirely understandable. Rather, he knows that God's will needs to be done through him. He sees that God wants his brothers to repent, so he helps make it happen. Conversely, we may be able to relate to the brothers' positions. As recovering addicts, we have probably been in some version of this scene, throwing ourselves at the mercy of someone we have wronged.

March 11th

Genesis 42:27 – “And as one of them opened his sack to give his ass provender in the lodging-place, he espied his money; and, behold, it was in the mouth of his sack.”

This is not a good thing ... to have their money put back in their sacks. Joseph's brothers have already been accused of spying. Now they might be seen as thieves. Of course, this worries the brothers. Not only is it totally confusing, it is also frightening. Yet, as they see much later, when the truth is revealed about how Joseph is, the story makes sense. In our journey through recovery, and unfortunately addiction as well, we may go through experiences that seem irredeemably bad: bad luck, bad circumstances. We are upset, surprised, and frightened by what happens to us. However, in so many cases, we may later perceive that these bad breaks happened for a reason, only one we did not understand at the time. We see this in the bankruptcy that gave us more time for spiritual growth, the problematic child that teaches us to be a better parent, and so on. If we can open ourselves to understanding that bad luck is sometimes an act of kindness from God, perhaps even an opportunity to work on ourselves, we can grow in recovery.

March 12th

Genesis 43:33 – “And they sat before him, the firstborn according to his birthright, and the youngest according to his youth; and the men marveled one with another.”

This is an amazing scene: Joseph, still unrevealed to his brothers, seats them in order of age around a table. This is more startling than it might seem. Due to the fact that the men had four mothers, many of them were virtually indistinguishable by age. There was no way that the Viceroy of Egypt could possibly have known who was the oldest, next oldest, and so on. Thus, the brothers “marvel” at what is going on. Surely, this was another not so pleasant surprise. As The Sages say, though, these confusing events later make sense when Joseph reveals himself. All the strange occurrences then have their logic and purpose revealed. So too, The Sages say, will all the strange and unexplained events of Jewish history make sense when The Messiah comes. Every step, and misstep, in Jewish national and personal histories will make perfect sense, a prelude to the ultimate redemption. In recovery, we could benefit from keeping this perspective in mind. There is a reason for things that happen, and though we may not understand them, we can still benefit from them, if not now, then in the future.

March 13th

Genesis 43:33 – “And they sat before him...”

We should all be asking ourselves, why did Joseph never communicate with his father that he was alive? You would think that after Joseph had risen to the position of Viceroy of Egypt, he could have sent word to Jacob, who was wracked with grief over his son's alleged death. Yet, we learn that Joseph felt bound by the solemn vow that his brothers had made not to tell their father the truth about Joseph. It is perplexing to our modern minds, but we need to understand that Joseph knew of the prophecy that predicted he was to play the role he did in saving the world from starvation. And, as we learn from The Sages, a vow to God made by 10 or more men cannot be violated, even under the most extreme of circumstances. Joseph held by this rule. Connecting this idea to recovery, we can learn something about the power of an oath to God. An oath to God is a very serious matter, and should not be taken lightly. If you are an addict, or are close to one, you may have made an oath at some point – “God – help me and I will never do this again...” only to violate that oath later. We should approach such oaths with great seriousness, and never treat them as trivial.

March 14th

Genesis 44:18 – “Then Judah came near unto him, and said: 'Oh my lord, let thy servant, I pray thee, speak a word in my lord's ears, and let not thine anger burn against thy servant; for thou art even as Pharaoh.'”

Isn't it remarkable to hear Judah say to Joseph, "...for thou art even as Pharaoh?" Joseph was so powerful, that only Pharaoh was higher than him. Given that Joseph was a boy when he came to Egypt and then spent 12 years in jail before instantly assuming this ultra-powerful rank, his status is all the more remarkable. But, as we should remember, Joseph was not an ordinary man, and his destiny was determined by God. God wanted him to be in the position he assumed, so God enabled it to happen. We can learn much from this point as we make our way through recovery. If God has a plan for us, then that is the way it is going to be. So many recovering addicts express amazement at the accomplishments in their lives after gaining sobriety – jobs, families, money, success, fame, respect, and on and on. Joseph's story can inspire us to realize that anything is possible with God's help and God's will.

March 15th

Genesis 44:18 – “Then Judah came near unto him, and said: 'Oh my lord, let thy servant, I pray thee, speak a word in my lord's ears, and let not thine anger burn against thy servant; for thou art even as Pharaoh.'”

The brothers did not recognize Joseph, despite many clues that they were in the presence of someone who knew things about them that only a family member – and certainly not an Egyptian ruler – would ever know. One interesting comment on this aspect of the story is that the brothers were unable to “see” Joseph, even though he was right in front of their faces, because to see him would be to admit that their judgment of him in the past had been a mistake. If you are in recovery, you might recognize this phenomenon. It’s a classic case of denial and self-will run riot. Like the brothers, we can spend 22 years believing in something that is incorrect, and ignore momentous evidence that we are wrong – all to avoid facing the truth. And, like the brothers, we may refuse to “see” the people in our lives for who they really are – good or bad – out of avoidance. Avoidance of facts, as well as emotional truths, is the hallmark of addiction. Our challenge is to move past this avoidance and get to honesty.

March 16th

Genesis 44:33 – “Now therefore, let thy servant, I pray thee, abide instead of the lad a bondman to my lord; and let the lad go up with his brethren.”

As Joseph prepares to carry out his plan to enslave Benjamin, Judah comes forward and offers to be kept prisoner in Benjamin’s place, so that Benjamin can return to Jacob. This is a remarkably selfless act, though it does contrast in many levels with the way that Judah and the other brothers treated Joseph and their father in the past. However, we can get a great message from this story for use in our recovery. As we might say in the rooms, Judah is prepared to “go to any length” to do the right thing. So, too, should we be ready to go to any length to stay sober.

March 17th

Genesis 45:24 – “So he sent his brethren away, and they departed; and he said unto them: 'See that ye fall not out by the way.'”

When Joseph sends his brothers back to bring Jacob to Egypt, he tells them, “See that ye fall not out by the way,” which can also be understood as, “Do not become agitated on the way,” – don’t fight, don’t be too worried, or upset. Perhaps what he is saying is: Don’t be afraid of Jacob’s reaction to learning about what has happened to me, on account of your actions years earlier.

It would be understandable for the brothers to fear their father’s wrath and become agitated or “fall out” on the way home to meet their father. Joseph, with his great wisdom, counsels them to stand firm and move forward. We face similar moments in recovery. For example, as we approach our fifth step, where we recount our inventory of character defects and addiction history to a sponsor or another trusted person, many of us experience tremendous fear. How can we admit what we have done in the past? Surely, it will destroy us. Surely, our sponsor will be judgmental. Yet, we can take comfort in Joseph’s suggestion. “See that ye fall not out by the way.” We should have the courage to complete our tasks of recovery, our journey to sobriety. God can help us if we seek Him.

March 18th

Genesis 45:26 – “And they told him, saying: 'Joseph is yet alive, and he is ruler over all the land of Egypt.' And his heart fainted, for he believed them not.”

When the brothers tell Jacob that Joseph is still alive, he does not believe them. On one level, of course Jacob is going to have trouble believing that his son is alive after all this time, and that not only is he alive, but he is a man of great power and fame. On another level, there's an additional reason for his disbelief: His sons have lied to him before. They lied about Joseph being killed by a wild animal. Thus, when they come bearing a new story about Joseph, he is not ready to believe them without question. This is the fate of a liar. Once a liar has violated the trust of another person, it is a big challenge to be believed again. As addicts, we have probably been through this. Addictive behavior brings out dishonest behavior, a result of self-seeking and the control that the disease exerts over us. In recovery, we may need to work hard on rebuilding the trust of those we have lied to in the past.

March 19th

Genesis 47:28 – “And Jacob lived in the land of Egypt seventeen years; so the days of Jacob, the years of his life, were a hundred forty and seven years.”

Finally, Jacob gets to “live.” After a life filled with pain and struggle, he spends the final years of his life “living” – the word is far from coincidental – in Egypt. At last, he was at peace. He knew that his beloved son, Joseph, was alive, and his family was all together. From a recovery perspective, we can learn from this somewhat counterintuitive idea that the end of one’s life, in old age, is “living.” As we may have seen in our own struggles, even a short period of serenity is worth years of addiction. We can grow and thrive in so many ways when we are sober and serene. And, it’s never too late to get started. We may be lucky enough to know an old newcomer: a man or woman who entered the program at an advanced age and attained sobriety. In most of these cases, you will hear from them that their quality of life is unparalleled as a sober old person, often after a lifetime of drinking. How inspiring this should be to us. If an old person can, like Jacob, claim the later years of his or her life in recovery, then we should press for our own recovery all the harder.

March 20th

Genesis 47:29 – “And the time drew near that Israel must die; and he called his son Joseph, and said unto him: ‘If now I have found favor in thy sight, put, I pray thee, thy hand under my thigh, and deal kindly and truly with me; bury me not, I pray thee, in Egypt.’”

In this verse, Jacob asks his powerful son, Joseph, to bury him in the cave of Machpelah in Hebron. Shortly after, in 47:31, he makes Joseph swear an oath to follow through on this promise. Why does Jacob insist that Joseph swear an oath? Isn't Joseph's word good enough? Jacob must have understood that Joseph, as the number-two leader in Egypt after Pharaoh, might have faced considerable pressure not to let his father be buried abroad. Burying Jacob in Egypt would have been a sign of respect to Pharaoh, and Jacob saw that Joseph could be tempted to please Pharaoh in this way. Hence the oath. In recovery, we experience similar situations, though usually not so profound. However, we should recognize the similarity to our own experience in the story of Joseph's oath to his father. We often have the best of intentions to follow through on an action, but circumstances intervene – often driven by addiction or bad recovery – and we rationalize taking a different, and usually incorrect, course.

March 21st

Genesis 48:5 – “And now thy two sons, who were born unto thee in the land of Egypt before I came unto thee into Egypt, are mine; Ephraim and Manasseh, even as Reuben and Simeon, shall be mine.”

Thus does Jacob make Joseph’s sons, Ephraim and Manasseh into his “own” and creates for them a full inheritance as tribe leaders of Israel. Ephraim and Manasseh each have their own tribes, equal in stature to those of their uncles – Simeon, Reuben, and so on. But, Joseph has no tribe of his own. Why is there no tribe of Joseph? At first glance, this seems unfair. Joseph was designated as the leader, he saved everyone’s life, he served and sacrificed mightily for the good of all Israel. Yet, he gets no tribe of his own. Of course, that isn’t necessarily true. Joseph gets two tribes, not one. They just don’t bear his name. From the perspective of recovery, we can see the “tribes” of Joseph in two distinct ways, each of which can help us understand our journey in recovery. At one level, Joseph might react with resentment at his father’s decree. “Why can’t I have my own tribe?” he might complain. That is how all of us have acted at some point in our addiction and recovery. Righteous anger at being left out of something. Yet, Joseph does not complain, because he understood that not only was he getting a double portion, he was also realizing the vision of Israel’s future through his children. As a mature person, he takes pride in the success of his children, and even though he doesn’t get the “credit” in name recognition, he is still happy for them. His behavior should be an inspiration to us.