Question: Can we be grateful for our past without being honest about it?

Torah Text: Genesis 32:10–12

וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב אֱלֹהֵי אָבִי אַבְרָהָם וֵאלֹהֵי אָבִי יִצְחָק יְהוָה הָאֹמֵר אֵלַי שׁוּב לְאַרְצְךָ
וּלְמוֹלַדְתְּךָ וְאֵיטִיבָה עִמָּךְ׃
קָטֹנְתִּי מִכֹּל הַחֲסָדִים וּמִכָּל הָאֱמֶת אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתָ אֶת־עַבְדֶּךָ כִּי בְמַקְלִי עָבַרְתִּי אֶת־הַיַּרְדֵּן
הַזֶּה וְעַתָּה הָיִיתִי לִשְׁנֵי מַחֲנוֹת׃
הַצִּילֵנִי נָא מִיַּד אָחִי מִיַּד עֵשָׂו כִּי־יָרֵא אָנֹכִי אֹתוֹ פֶּן־יָבוֹא וְהִכַּנִי אֵם עַל־בָּנִים׃

Jacob said: "God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac, Adonai, who told me, 'Return to your land and your birthplace, and I will deal well with you': I am unworthy of all the kindness and faithfulness You have shown Your servant. With only my staff I crossed this Jordan, and now I have become two camps. Save me, I pray, from my brother, from Esau, for I am afraid of him, lest he come and attack me, mothers and children alike."

Rashi
[11th C., France]

My merits have been diminished by the kindnesses and truth You have shown me. Therefore I fear that perhaps, since You made Your promise to me, I have become corrupted through sin, and this will cause me to be delivered into Esau's hands.

Ramban
[13th C., Spain]

This is Rashi's interpretation, but it is not correct according to the language of Scripture. Jacob says afterward, 'You said: I will surely do good to you.' What use would that assurance be if subsequent sin could annul it? Rather, 'I am too small' means that Jacob was unworthy of all the kindness God had done for him, both what was promised and other kindnesses."

Babylonian Talmud, Berakhot 54a
[5th C., Babylonia]

One must recite a blessing for the bad that befalls a person just as one recites a blessing for the good. Ben Azzai teaches: "One gives thanks for what is past and offers a prayer for what is to come."

Deuteronomy 26:5–10

My ancestor was a wandering Aramean. He went down to Egypt and lived there as a foreigner, few in number, but there he became a great and numerous nation. The Egyptians treated us harshly and oppressed us, imposing hard labor upon us. We cried out to Adonai, the God of our ancestors, and Adonai heard our voice and saw our suffering … Adonai brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm … and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey.

And now, behold, I bring the first fruits of the soil that You, Adonai, have given me.

George Washington, Thanksgiving Proclamation
[October 3, 1789]

Whereas it is the duty of all Nations to acknowledge the providence of Almighty God, to obey his will, to be grateful for his benefits, and humbly to implore his protection and favor. [May we] beseech him to pardon our national and other transgressions.

Abraham Lincoln, Thanksgiving Proclamation
[October 3, 1863]

The year that is drawing toward its close has been filled with the blessings of fruitful fields and healthful skies. To these bounties, which are so constantly enjoyed that we are prone to forget the source from which they come, others have been added. And I recommend to them that while offering up the ascriptions justly due to Him for such singular deliverances and blessings they do also, with humble penitence for our national perverseness and disobedience."

Frederick Douglass, What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?
[July 5, 1852]

Are the great principles of political freedom and of natural justice, embodied in that Declaration of Independence, extended to us? What to the American slave is your Fourth of July? I answer, a day that reveals to him, more than all other days in the year, the gross injustice and cruelty to which he is the constant victim.

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, Happiness: A Jewish Perspective
[2014]

Memory and gratitude, argues Moses, are the only antidotes to the corrupting power of affluence.

Rebecca Clarren, The Cost of Free Land
[2026, America]

Once those living in the house know what happened, they must do something to make amends.

Genesis 33:9–11
Esau said, "I have plenty, my brother; let what you have remain yours." Jacob said, "No, please. If I have found favor in your eyes, take my gift from my hand, for seeing your face is like seeing the face of God, and you have received me favorably. Please accept my blessing that has been brought to you, because God has dealt generously with me, and I have everything." And he pressed him, and he accepted.