

א ב י ס כ ל ת ו ר א !

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כ"ב כסלו תשפ"ו · וישב

וַיִּמָּאֵן - A Story of Temptation, Trial, and Triumph

By Yochanan Cramer '26

While many point out יעקב and his sons' shortcomings in this week's פרשה - פרשה יעקב - playing favorites with his second-youngest son, the brothers near-murder of יוסף fueled by hatred and jealousy, or יהודה's saga of sin and eventual redemption - there is also an aspect of triumph in our people's history that should not be overlooked.

The fifth עליה is an apt segue into the story: וַיְהִי יוֹסֵף "וְיָהִי יוֹסֵף" now was well built and good looking" (בראשית לט:). At this point, the sixth עליה begins with the wife of פוטיפר tempting the handsome יוסף to appease her lustful desires. He then responds with possibly the best possible way a virtuous young man could have: "וַיִּמָּאֵן" - (בראשית לט:טז) - as supported by the use of the שלשלת (the squigly line above the word) and פסיק (the line after the word) cantillations (טעמי מקרא) - to her unwanted advances. הֵן אֲדֹנָי לֹא יַדְעָ אֶתִּי מִהֶבְבֵּית וְכָל "וְיָהִי יוֹסֵף" continues and says: "אֲשֶׁר־יִשְׁלֹן נָתַן בְּיָדִי אֵינֶנּוּ גְדֹלָה" He goes on, בְּבֵית הַזֶּה מִמֶּנִּי וְלֹא־חֵשֶׁךְ מִמֶּנִּי מֵאֲזִמָּה כִּי אִם־אוֹתָךְ בְּאֶשֶׁר "אֶת־אֲשֶׁתְּךָ וְאֶת־אֶעְשֶׂה הָרָעָה הַגְּדֹלָה הַזֹּאת וְחִטָּאתִי לֹא־לְקִים He wields no more authority in this house than I, and he has withheld nothing from me except yourself, since you are his wife. How, then, could I do this most wicked thing, and sin before G-d?" (בראשית לט:טז) רבנו בחיי delineates that the long, wavering שלשלת cantillation which, only appearing four times in the תורה and three times in נ"ך, signals that יוסף's refusal, was not as simple

as it seems in the greater scheme of the drama of פרשת וישב.

Readers of the תורה have a field day whenever the שלשלת comes up, as it sounds different from all other cantillations. And so does the מנחת שי: he explains that there was strain under the surface of the story, much like body language that reveals the truth even when our words stay polite.

Subsequently, יוסף begins his response with the phrase "הן אדוני" On the basic level, he means that פוטיפר is present in her life, so her request makes no sense. מדרש מדרש (וישב ח:א) reveals a deeper layer. At that moment of great trial, the מדרש imagines יוסף suddenly seeing the image of his father יעקב. That vision steadies him and reminds him of the future that waits for him. His name is meant to be engraved alongside his brothers on the stones of the אפוד (one of the items the גדול would wear). A single poor choice here could erase that future and leave him wandering in a life that betrays everything he comes from. The שלשלת holds that hesitation; the memory of יעקב holds the moral decision. It becomes a model for anyone standing at a crossroads where desire pulls one way, and identity pulls the other.

With this added layer of knowledge we should take away from the story that hesitation does not make a person weak; rather, it tests their self-honesty and integrity in the face of a plight. While the שלשלת reveals a צדיק trembling before a temptation for sin, the תורה is clear that יוסף did not succumb to it. He resisted it; his will-power and moral compass overcame his יצר הרע (with a little help from his father's countenance). In a world overflowing with materialism, constant

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comparison, and temptations presented as normal aspects of life, the ability to pause and choose the path of life is more essential than ever. When משה רבינו is nearing the end of his life, standing at the convergence of ארץ ישראל and ערבות מואב, this is what he assures our people: "החיים והמנוח נתתי לפניך הברכה והקללה ובהרפת בחרתם" "I have put before you life and death, blessing and curse. Choose life so that you and your offspring may live" (דברים:ל"ט). And finally, as דוד says: "תודיעני" ארח חיים שובע שמחות את-פניך נעמנות" "You (G-d) will teach me the path of life. In Your presence is perfect joy; delights are ever in Your right hand" (תהילים:טז:יא). May we all choose the path of life, the אורח חיים of Hashem. To Serve Hashem Look Beyond Onself Truth or Kindness?

Saying the Right Thing is Always Best

By Daniella Feder '28

In this week's פרשה, פרשת וישב, יוסף is the greatly favored son out of all of יעקב's children. Although sibling rivalries are typically nothing to note, יוסף's brothers were so angered by him that they were not able to speak with יוסף peacefully, "וַיִּשְׁנְאוּ אוֹתוֹ וְלֹא יָבִלּוּ דְבָרָם לְשָׁלֹם:" "they hated him so that they could not speak a friendly word to him." (בראשית לז:ד). It is not hard to imagine being unable to speak kindly to someone at any given moment when things get tense, but that does not seem to be what the תורה is talking about. ספורנו explains on that פסוק that although the brothers sometimes had to speak with יוסף about their household jobs, their chores, they were unable to speak like brothers about

anything personal. "לֹא יָבִלּוּ לְדַבֵּר עִמּוֹ לְשָׁלוֹם וְרַעוּת" "they did not speak to him concerning any private matters or brotherly concerns." This behavior seems like a bad thing as the brothers couldn't express their emotions with each other. However, רש"י reads into this פסוק slightly differently, deciding to paint the brothers in a better light. He says that the brothers spoke what they truly felt in their hearts instead of lying to their brother. "שָׁלֹא דְבָרָם אֶחָת" "בְּפֶה וְאֶחָת בְּלֵב" "they did not say one thing and feel a different way". Saying the right thing in hard times is never an easy thing to do, but the תורה shows us how deeply our words can affect our relationships. From ספורנו and רש"י's interpretations of the text, we see that there is a fine line between honest connection and forced politeness, so taking a step back to think can help us find the balance between truth and kindness.



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