

# VAYEISHEV



## INSPIRATION

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### CHUMASH MESORAS HARAV

וינער בן אביו (בראשית לז:)

And his father rebuked him. (Bereishis 37:10)

After Joseph recounted his first dream involving sheaves of wheat, the Torah does not describe any reaction by Jacob. Only when he shared his second dream, when the stars, moon, and sun bowed down to him, does the Torah mention Jacob's rebuke. The themes of both dreams seem identical; why did Jacob only rebuke Joseph after recounting the second dream?

The first dream, involving sheaves of wheat bowing to Joseph's sheaf, represented Joseph's political and economic power, and his brothers' dependence on that power for their own well-being. This aspect of Joseph's dream did not trouble Jacob. The first dream would be fulfilled precisely as Joseph understood. There would indeed

come a time when Joseph would be ruler, supporting an entire land and its population—including his own brothers, who would ultimately bow to him.

The physical dependence of poor on rich, weak on strong, is a ubiquitous relationship. The obeisance of the brothers in Joseph's first dream was of an economic and political nature. Physical and economic dependence on a benefactor does not detract from the intrinsic honor of the beneficiary. No jealousy was therefore expressed by his brothers, nor any rebuke by his father.

However, the second dream, involving the sun, moon, and stars bowing to Joseph, represented an attempt by Joseph to arrogate for himself a different type of authority. The subservience of the heavenly bodies denotes spiritual rather than

economic subordination. Joseph felt that his mission on earth was of greater spiritual import than that of his brothers. A person's intrinsic holiness is based on the fact that he is assigned a personal mission by God. In maintaining that his mission was more sacred than that of his brothers, Joseph was in essence suggesting that he was endowed with more holiness than his brothers.

(Derashot Harav, pp. 59-60)

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### PERFORMING UNDER PRESSURE



In Parashat Vayeshev, the Torah describes two seemingly disconnected stories: the incident between Yehudah and Tamar, and Yosef's journey down to Egypt.

The Torah explains that the firstborn son of Yehudah married Tamar but died at a young age, leaving Tamar a widow. His younger brother then married Tamar because of the obligation of *yibum*, but he, too, died shortly after. Tamar, noticing that Yehudah did not want to let his third and youngest son marry her, decided to take control of the situation and seduced Yehudah into having relations with her. However, she didn't show Yehudah who she was. Soon after, Tamar became pregnant, resulting in a death sentence for committing the sin of denying her connection to Yehudah's third son through *yibum*.

Right before Tamar was executed, however, she privately revealed to Yehudah that he was the father. Yehudah admitted to the act and Tamar was saved. We learn that because of this, one of her sons would be the ancestor of King David, who is known to be the ancestor of Mashiach.

The second story in Vayeshev portrays Yosef as he goes to Egypt. Yosef was a slave to Potiphar, one of the wealthiest men in Egypt. While Potiphar liked Yosef, his wife liked him in a different type of way. One day, when Yosef and Potiphar's wife were alone in the house, she confronted Yosef, trying to persuade him to have relations with her. But being the holy Jew he was, Yosef rejected her. Potiphar's wife then went on to lie to Potiphar that Yosef had confronted her. Potiphar became very angry at this, so he

threw Yosef into prison for several years.

Just from reading this, one would easily think that Potiphar's wife was an evil, destructive woman, but we learn from our Sages that this is not completely true. Rashi explains that these two stories are mentioned in Vayeshev in order to teach us that just as Tamar had the most holy intentions in ensuring that the line of Yehudah would continue, so too, did Potiphar's wife.

Potiphar's wife saw in the stars that Yosef's descendants were to come from her seed, but she did not realize that it was to be the seed of her daughter – and not her.

Looking at Rashi's explanation, we have to ask the question: If Potiphar's wife was pure

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# FIVELIGHTS

## 5 INSPIRATIONAL HIGHLIGHTS ON THE PARSHA

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# 1

Did Yosef even deserve to be punished for relating his negative reports? After all, there are situations where it is permitted – or even obligatory – to relate information that under other circumstances would be considered lashon hara.

In Shmiras HaLashon, the Chofetz Chaim explains that Yosef did two things right but one thing wrong. As we see in Bereishis 37:2, Yosef only shared the negative reports with Yaakov and not with anyone else; this was proper behavior. Furthermore, Yosef's motivations were constructive – to correct what he took to be misbehavior on the part of his brothers; this was also correct on his part.

Where Yosef erred was that **he took the negative information to his father first, instead of confronting his brothers**. Had Yosef spoken to his brothers directly, they could have corrected any mistaken impressions he may have had about their actions. We see from this that it is appropriate to rebuke a person before resorting to “turning them in.” It was for this error in judgment that Yosef was punished.

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# 2

He saw his father peering through the window. This, the Talmud in Sotah (36b) explains, is what stopped Yosef from sinning with the wife of Potifar. It's somewhat curious that the Talmud specifically states that he saw his father through a window. In fact, Tosafos (Sotah ibid.) wonder how did the Talmud even derive that it was through a window that his father was seen? What is the significance of the window?

Rabbi Moshe Einzadter explains that when a person is in the heat of passion, they are transfixed on the object of their desires. They are, in some way, in a box. **In order to combat the perverted perspective of our passions, we need windows**. A window is an opening that reminds us that there is more to life than the transient treat our heart desires. Yosef was able to remain disciplined in the face of the advances of the wife of Potifar because he was reminded of his future greatness – through a window.

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# 3

When Yehuda tried to send wages to Tamar – who had been disguised as a prostitute – the locals told the messenger, “*there was no prostitute here*” (Bereishis 38:21). The simple meaning of the verse is that Tamar came, donned her disguise, and was gone before anyone other than Yehuda could see her. Rav Dovid Feinstein says that the deeper meaning of the verse may be that **there was never a prostitute there at all** – not even during Tamar's dalliance with Yehuda.

We know that Tamar's motivations were pure – the Torah's narrative makes it clear – but why did God desire things to play out in this fashion?

The Talmud in Yoma (22b) asks why Shaul HaMelech's reign was not passed to his son. It answers that it was because Shaul's lineage was unblemished. From this, the Talmud concludes that **a ruler must have some blemish in his family history in order to help keep him humble**. In order for David to found the permanent dynasty – as well as the roots of Moshiach – it was necessary to have incidents like Yehuda and Tamar in his lineage. (See also: Ruth and Boaz, which was considered scandalous in its day.) These relationships are pure – “*there was no prostitute here*” – but they serve to keep a ruler grounded.

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# 4

What makes a leader? In our parsha, Reuven plans to rescue Yosef and return him to Yaakov. He fails to see his plan through, and it is Yehuda who ends up saving Yosef, albeit to have him sold into slavery.

Later, in parshas Mikeitz, Reuven suggests a plan to rescue Shimon from the Egyptian viceroy (secretly Yosef). Yaakov not only rejects the idea, he actively belittles it. Later, Yehuda suggests a course of action that's not much better, but Yaakov accepts it. Rashi (43:2) cites the Midrash that Reuven told his brothers that they had to wait for the time to be right; Reuven made his suggestion upon their return from Egypt, while Yehuda waited until the food ran out, necessitating a return to Egypt. It wasn't that Yehuda's plan was better; **his judgment was better because he waited for the right moment**.

Reuven's tendency to act impulsively is also reflected in Yaakov's deathbed blessing/rebuke, in which he called his oldest son “as unstable as water,” for which reason Reuven forfeited the rights of the firstborn (49:4). Yes, Reuven tried to take the initiative, which was to be commended, but in the end he was too impetuous to be a leader. Yehuda, on the other hand, demonstrated the judgment and temperament necessary for the job.

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# 5

Rashi on Bereishis 37:2 tells us that Yosef spoke badly to Yaakov about his brothers in three areas. For each of these things, he was punished measure-for-measure, an aspect of his ordeal corresponding to his negative reports. One of these three accusations was that the brothers ate *Eiver Min HaChai*, meat taken from a live animal. If the brothers never did such a thing, how could Yosef have thought that they had?

Not to eat *Eiver Min HaChai* is one of the *Sheva Mitzvos Bnei Noach*, the seven universal laws that apply to all mankind. **There are, however, differences in the details between the way Jews and non-Jews observe this mitzvah**. Let's say that an animal is properly slaughtered but the meat is taken from the animal before it is actually dead. In such a case, this meat is not considered *Eiver Min HaChai* for Jews (for whom *shechitah* – ritual slaughter – is relevant). Non-Jews, who do not have a mitzvah of *shechitah*, must wait until the animal has died or the meat would be prohibited as *Eiver Min HaChai*.

What was the halachic status of Yaakov's sons, given that the Torah had not yet been given? Yosef was of the opinion that they were halachically non-Jews; accordingly, meat taken in-between an animal's slaughter and its death would be prohibited to them. The brothers, however, were of the opinion that they were halachically Jews, so that meat taken after slaughter was permitted to them even before the animal actually died.

Yosef's negative report about *Eiver Min HaChai* reflected not so much a difference of opinion as to the facts on the ground, but rather about this underlying difference of basic philosophy.

# SEE IT **INSIDE**

Parsha ideas that are so good, you have to see them inside!

<b>OHR HACHAIM 37:5</b>	Why did Yosef keep telling his brothers his dreams? Didn't he realize they would only hate him more for that?
<b>SEFORNO 37:6</b>	"Listen up" – the straw that broke the brothers' back.
<b>RAMBAN 37:15</b>	The original version of "Man plans, God laughs."
<b>OHR HACHAIM 37:21</b>	Our choices alter our destiny.
<b>SEFORNO 37:25</b>	Thinking about food at a time like this?!? How did Yosef's brothers eat after they sold him into slavery?
<b>CHIZKUNI 37:27</b>	The brothers sold Yosef into slavery to fulfill a prophecy.
<b>BAAL HATURIM 37:28</b>	Why did they sell Yosef for twenty coins?
<b>RABBEINU BACHAYE 37:28</b>	More on the significance of the twenty coins.
<b>RAMBAN 38:3</b>	What's in a name?
<b>RAMBAN 38:8</b>	When was the concept of Yibum born?
<b>RABBEINU BACHAYE 38:31</b>	Yosef was partially responsible for being sold into slavery.

Based on this week's parsha, Yossi Ives on Chabad.org shares a beautiful perspective on how to treat people who are feeling down:

You are walking down the street when you pass an old friend whose head is down, a deep frown etched on her face. You instinctively say to her, "Cheer up," hoping to lift her spirits.

Well, it won't. It will, however, make her angry, frustrated and more depressed. You are being an insensitive boor and you don't even know it. If that's all you've got to say, keep quiet and offer a friendly smile, not a trite comment. If I am going through a hard time, I don't want someone to tell me to be cheerful – I want someone to understand why I am miserable.

"Cheer up" implies that I have no reason for feeling bad. Let's face it: chances are that I'm not sad for the sheer fun of it. Something is obviously troubling me, causing me to be melancholy. Telling me to cheer up is effectively denying me the right to feel upset about it. Imagine the burden I now carry: I not only have a worrying problem, I'm not even allowed to feel bad about it!

It is also an insult to imply that becoming cheerful is simple and easy. It is like saying, "What's wrong with you? Pull yourself together." When someone is depressed – over finances, a troubled marriage, or whatever – the last thing they want is to be made to feel inadequate for feeling low. If it were that easy for them, they would have cheered up without your sage advice.

Take a leaf out of the book of the biblical Joseph. He was languishing in an Egyptian jail with two of Pharaoh's ministers, when one morning he notices they are in a foul mood. What does Joseph tell them? Does he tell them, "Chin up"? Actually, he doesn't tell them anything – instead he asks them a question: "Why are you sad today?" which is their cue to unburden themselves to Joseph.

Joseph did something very profound. He didn't tell them how to feel; instead he gave them an opportunity to talk about their problems. Joseph realized that in 99% of cases people are upset for a reason. The way to help them is to encourage them to talk about the problem and to help them work towards a solution.



# CONVERSATIONS WITH SHOSHANA SAMUELS



Shoshana Samuels is a Yoetzet Halacha in Teaneck, based at Congregation Rinat Yisrael.

## WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE PARSHAN OR BOOK ON CHUMASH?

I really enjoy the Torah Temima's work. The collection of midrashim and Rav Baruch HaLevi Epstein's questions and insightful answers are often new to me and thought-provoking.

## WHAT DO YOU THINK IS THE MOST IMPORTANT INGREDIENT IN STAYING INSPIRED?

Hands down, continued learning. Setting a time for consistent Torah learning ensures perpetual growth. At the very least, this is the growth of someone's Jewish knowledge. At most – and this is common – it's the growth of his or her yirat and ahavat Hashem.

## WHAT IS ONE CHALLENGE YOU THINK AMERICAN ORTHODOXY NEEDS TO MEET IN THIS NEXT GENERATION?

The challenge of "being." We have begun to do almost everything a mile a minute and it's not easy to live at this pace. It is difficult on relationships and individuals. I see this all the time in my work as a community Yoetzet Halacha. People need to breathe a little. Families need to breathe a little. American Orthodoxy can strengthen itself and its next generation by practicing – demanding – a slower pace, a program that is less programmed, not just on Shabbos, but every day of the week. The American Orthodox community's greatest challenge is the same as that of the American Jewish community: the problem of disconnection. A little more time for hanging out with oneself and one's family, friends, and neighbors can lead to a lot more connection, and connection is the antidote to disconnection. And connection strengthens people and community's avodat Hashem.

## WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO YOUNG PEOPLE WHO WANT TO BE TEACHERS IN THE ORTHODOX COMMUNITY?

The best Torah leaders and teachers are so

filled up personally by their involvement in Torah, mitzvot and avodat Hashem that it spills out over to the people around them. I advise anyone who is planning to serve the Jewish community that they should work hard to be sure their cup is always so full that their teachings pour out from them naturally. This has tremendous benefit for the individual, his or her students, and the community at large.

For me, the best way to do this is by engaging in consistent Torah study. I personally felt recently that I was drying up on this front and realized it'd been too long since I studied Torah at a high level on a consistent basis. I feel so blessed to have committed myself seriously this year to a solid and consistent chavruta in mishnayot. Now, thank G-d, when I teach halacha or any Torah class, I sense again that my passion for these topics is bubbling forth from within. I imagine that for different people this kind of "filling up" comes from different places. I advise anyone planning to serve the community to keep a good pulse on this as time goes by and to keep oneself as a top priority, not despite the community's needs, but because of them.

## PERFORMING UNDER PRESSURE CONTINUED FROM FRONT

in her intentions with Yosef, why did she lie to Potiphar and cause Yosef to have to go through such misery and hard work after rejecting her?

The answer to this question is something we experience very often. The difference between Tamar and Potiphar's wife is that

when the situation became troubling and uncomfortable, Tamar remained calm and collected, and Potiphar's wife exploded with anger and revenge. Often in our lives, things will not go as we planned them, but what we do as soon as the plan fails is what determines our fate. If we are able to treat the situation deliberately and carefully,

much good can result. But if we react with anger and lash out, nothing good will ever come as a result.

May we all react to troubling situations with care and deliberation.

*Ethan Dalva is a member of NCSY's National Teen Board.*

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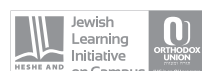
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