

Rabbi Shlomo Farhi

VAYESHEV— SPLITTING HAIRS

Chasing Perfection, Missing the Moment Yosef, Yehuda, and the Path We Expect From Others

Chasing Perfection, Missing the Moment: Yosef, Yehuda, and the Path We Expect From Others

Yosef the “nār.” A word that never sat right.

The pasuk introduces Yosef with a strange descriptor:

וְהוּא נֶעַר — “And he was a young lad.”

Seventeen years old. Mature enough to work. Mature enough for responsibility. Mature enough to be the center of the entire future of Klal Yisrael.

So why call him a *boy*?

Rashi says it's because Yosef was behaving immaturely.
What was he doing?

מְתַקֵּן בְּשָׁעֵרוֹ — he was playing with his hair.

Fixing it. Curling it. Fussing over it.

Now, on a personal note — I sympathize.
When the barber asks me what I want, I'm like:
“Eh... whatever. Same thing.”
If it's a fade? Great.
If it's not? Great.
I fall asleep in the barber's chair.

One time I even cut my *own* hair before Shabbat. Nobody noticed.
This made me question my life choices — and my bank statements.

So yes — Yosef fiddling with his hair seems trivial, immature, a 17-year-old worrying about style.

Fine.
But then something doesn't fit.

Two verses later: prophecy. From hair-gel to heaven?!

How do we go from Yosef styling his curls to Yosef receiving dreams straight from Hashem?

I have difficulty picturing Hashem calling out:

“Yosef!”

And Yosef responding:

“One sec, Ribbono Shel Olam, the conditioner is in my eyes.”

It didn’t add up.

And then I saw a teaching from **Rav Simcha Bunim of Peshischa** — and it reframed everything.

The Red Cow, tiny hairs, and the pursuit of impossible purity

Rav Bunim notes the strange halachah of the **parah adumah**:

- One black hair? Still kosher.
- Two black hairs? Pasul.

But a korban? Even the *smallest blemish* disqualifies it.

Why the difference?

Because blemishes represent “who you are.”

But hairs represent “what you’re aspiring toward.”

And Rav Bunim says:

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****Hashem judges regular people with compassion.**

But tzaddikim?

Hashem is exacting with them “like a single hair.”**

Yosef isn't fussing with his hair out of vanity.

He is symbolically aligning himself with:

The pursuit of perfect spiritual precision.

A tzaddik whose inner world is so refined that even a “hair’s breadth” matters.

Yosef is not polishing his curls.

He is polishing his *neshamah*.

Suddenly the transition makes sense:

- Boy plays with hair? Immature.
- Future tzaddik striving for perfection? Profound.

But then a new problem appears...

If Yosef is reaching for greatness — why call him immature?

Perfection is noble.

Striving for holiness is admirable.

So why is he labeled a **nar** — a child?

Because perfection has a flaw:

Perfection pursued at the wrong time becomes arrogance.

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Yosef seeks a level appropriate for a seasoned tzaddik.
But he is seventeen.

A young man who wants to jump stages — spiritually, emotionally, relationally — is not profound.
He is **premature**.

Look at what happens next:

Yosef tells his brothers his dreams — dreams where they bow to him.
He expects them to say:

“Oh, amazing! We bow to you? We love that. Can we do it now or should we schedule?”

This is not insight — this is naivete.
This is the **blindness of perfectionism**.

The blind spot of perfectionists

A perfectionist often doesn't realize:

- The world is not on their level
- People aren't operating with their clarity
- Humans are messy
- Life takes time
- Growth is slow

A perfectionist thinks:

“I demand this of myself —
therefore *you* must also meet that standard.”

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This destroys marriages, classrooms, friendships, synagogues.

A perfectionist spouse?

Everything must be precise.

The house must be immaculate.

Meanwhile, joy comes from the spouse who loosens them up — but they don't appreciate that.

A perfectionist parent?

"Why didn't you think this through?"

Because they're *children!*

It's in their job description.

A perfectionist teacher?

"Absolute silence for five hours!"

You want that?

Get a pet rock.

A perfectionist synagogue?

They want kids in shul —

but silent, still, angelic, motionless.

They want new members —

but get furious when someone's phone rings.

And the irony?

If someone had told *your* grandfather:

"You don't belong in shul until your Shabbos is perfect,"
you would not be sitting here today.

We forget where we came from.

We expect others to begin where we ended.

That — the Torah tells us — is **nārishkeit**. Immaturity.

Even when it comes from a Yosef.

Perfection at the wrong time becomes immaturity

Rav Bunim taught us something stunning:

Yosef wasn't curling his hair out of vanity.

He was chasing a level of spiritual exactness appropriate for a tzaddik.

He wanted not just purity — but **perfection**.

But perfection is tricky.

Because even if the goal is right,

if the timing is wrong... the goal becomes wrong.

A 17-year-old chasing absolute perfection is noble.

A 17-year-old expecting *others* to be perfect is immature.

That's why the Torah calls him a נָעָר — **nar**.

Not because he's childish in essence —

but because he applies a mature ideal at an immature time.

And this, my friends, is where the lesson explodes open.

Expecting perfection from others destroys relationships

Perfectionism is seductive.

A perfectionist says:

- *I'm neat — why can't you be neat?*

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- *I'm responsible — why can't you get it together?*
- *I work on myself — why don't you?*

But a perfectionist doesn't realize:

You want perfection for yourself? Beautiful.
You want perfection from others? Destructive.

This is where marriages crack.
This is where friendships erode.
This is where classrooms fall apart.
This is where synagogues become unwelcoming.

Let's go through the examples *exactly as Rabbi Farhi taught them*:

Parents & Kids: expecting adult thinking from children

How many times does a parent say:

“Why didn't you think this through?”

Because they're kids!
They *don't* think things through.
It says it right there in their job description.

Your job is to embarrass them in public;
their job is to drive you crazy at home.

Expecting adult-level foresight from a child is — yes — **immaturity**.

Teachers: expecting angels in the classroom

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How many Rebbes or teachers hold students to impossible standards?

“Absolute silence for five hours straight.”

You want absolute silence for five hours?

Get yourself a pet rock.

Children make noise.

Children wiggle.

Children ask questions—not always helpful questions, but questions nonetheless.

To demand perfection from a child is to misunderstand what a child *is*.

Synagogues: welcoming people but rejecting their imperfections

And now we come to the **Shabbat questions** theme — which is crucial:

You want children to come to Shul.

Amazing. Beautiful. Necessary.

But then you want them to sit perfectly still, quietly, without making a sound.

What are we doing — handing out **mouth tape** at the door?

You have a Beit Knesset with twelve people.

You want more people to come.

But then someone's phone rings...

And suddenly the guy is treated like he committed a capital offense.

You're bringing in people who are *not like you*, who *don't know the rules*, who *didn't grow up with this*.

What do we expect?

And now the punchline — the MOST important Farhi question in the whole shiur:

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What if, years ago, at Shaarei Zion, Hamenayakob Kassim had said to your grandfather:

“Don’t come to Shul because your Shabbat isn’t perfect”?

Would you be sitting in Shul today?

Would your kids be sitting here?

Would your grandchildren?

The answer is obvious.

So why are we denying beginners the very beginning that *we* or *our families* once had?

Yosef vs. Yehuda: two models of leadership

To add depth, the Torah presents us with two kings, two spiritual personalities:

Yosef — the tzaddik who never sins.

Yehuda — the tzaddik who *admits* when he sins.

Yosef represents perfection.

Yehuda represents teshuva.

Which one can lead a nation of imperfect human beings?

Yosef’s level is inspiring.

But can the average Jew relate to it?

Yehuda sinned, stumbled, and got up again —

that is a leader the Jewish people can recognize in themselves.

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This is why Mashiach ben Yosef prepares the path,
but Mashiach ben David completes the mission.

Because you can't redeem a nation of imperfect people
with a leader they can't see themselves in.

Yosef's mistake: expecting others to walk a path he was only beginning

Rav Bunim reveals the meaning of "*vehu nar*":

**Yosef tried to prepare a path for others —
but demanded they already be walking it.**

He wanted to chart a road toward spiritual perfection.
Beautiful. Noble. Holy.

But demanding that his brothers — grown men with their own struggles — accept his dreams of
superiority?

That wasn't holiness.

That was youth.

That was immaturity.

That was failure to understand timing.

Even the greatest goals must come at the right stage.

The REAL lesson: Growth is slow. People need room.

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Parents — don't expect your kids to jump to your level.

Teachers — don't expect students to leap to mastery without stumbling.

Shuls — don't expect newcomers to act like seasoned veterans.

And individually — don't expect yourself to grow overnight.

You want to pursue perfection? Amazing.

But perfection cannot be **demand**ed of others.

It must be **earned**, **learn**ed, and **grown into**, step by step.

✨ SHABBAT TABLE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS ✨

(as requested — included correctly and in full)

1 What expectations do I place on others that come from *my* stage, not theirs?

Am I judging people based on the journey I've already taken — not the journey they're just beginning?

2 Where in my life am I chasing perfection at the wrong stage?

How can I pursue high standards without crushing myself or others?

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3 Do I relate more to Yosef's perfection or Yehuda's honesty?

Which model do I want to embody in my home, my Shabbat table, my shul, and my personal growth?
