



# GROWTH

## At The

# SHABBAT TABLE

## PARSHAT VAYESHEV

### Holiday Season

As Chanukah this year happens to coincide with holidays celebrated by the gentiles, one can't help appreciating the emblematic contrast.

Noticing all the decorations around this time of year, I found myself thinking and coming to admire a powerful truth symbolized by ancient Jewish tradition. Both Jews and gentiles celebrate with lights. Unlike the rest of the world, though, we don't decorate our houses and cars with extravagant, colorful, twinkling string lights. Nor does halacha dictate that we design our front lawn with a huge ornament or an inflatable jolly old man (or even a blow-up dreidel, for that matter). Instead, we merely ignite one small candle – which doesn't even need to illuminate for more than half an hour!

Moreover, whereas their holiday involves bringing trees from the outdoors inside their homes, where their ornaments glimmer behind closed doors, Chanukah stresses just the opposite – to kindle the menorah by the window (ideally even outside the door of the house).

I believe this signifies something profound. Jewish traditions are replete with meaning and wisdom, and perhaps, this comes to represent that spreading light and moral clarity in the world – the ultimate mission of *Am Yisrael* – always starts with something small, and is only powerful when shared with others. The world may think that only big and bright lights make an impact. They may obsess over merely internalizing it themselves. However, we've known for millennia that all it takes is one small deed to change the world, and the mere small flame we enkindle today is the one that still sparks hope, thousands of years later.

### The Most Honorable Title

*R' Dovid Moshe Goldman, a great rabbi from Ukraine, was sent for seven years to the gulag in Siberia. After seven long, arduous, and torturous years, the big moment finally arrived. The warden called over R' Goldman and informed him that they were letting him free. "Sign these papers, and you can go." Finally, there would be an end to the suffering! There was only one problem, however. That day happened to be Shabbat – a day in which Jews aren't able to write. "I'm sorry," said R' Goldman. "But I can't sign these papers until tonight or tomorrow." The warden was astounded. "Are you crazy?" he yelled. "I am giving you an opportunity to leave this gulag now, and because of your Sabbath, you're not going to sign these papers?" R' Goldman stood firm, "I am not going to violate my Shabbat."*

*As it turned out, there was another Jew imprisoned there – an old man, who happened to be a communist. He wasn't observant of the Jewish faith in the slightest; he certainly did not keep Shabbat. He, too, was given the offer of being set free. But when he saw the sacrifice of the Jew near him, he didn't have the heart to violate Shabbat and astonishingly refused to sign as well. Immediately, R' Goldman turned to the warden and assured that he would sign for his fellow Jew. "What??" barked the warden. "I thought you said that you can't sign on the Sabbath!"*

*"That's true," he explained. "But if it's in order to save a life, you're allowed to violate the Sabbath. I am still strong and fine; I can stay here longer. But this Jew is elderly and frail – every day he's in Siberia is a serious threat to his life. For him, I'm allowed to sign the papers, even on the Sabbath."*

*The warden at that point was moved. "I will sign the papers for both of you. Have a good Sabbath, and get out of here." [1]*

The story of Yosef is truly one of wonder. Here was a 17-year-old kid who had been stabbed in the back by his own family, sold to slave away for the rest of his life in Egypt. However, when tough became even tougher, as the wife of Potiphar endlessly tried seducing him, he stood firm to his Jewish faith. He told her that he couldn't give in to her, for he will "have sinned before G-d." Right there – that moment, which was followed by more pain and darkness, as he would then be spending a dozen years in a dungeon – was actually the catalyst for an unbelievable rise to power in the plot twist narrated in next week's Parsha. The moment Yosef held firm to his roots and embraced his inherent identity as a Jew was ultimately when he planted the seeds for untold greatness. Only after stepping up when faced with such difficult challenges was he ready to bring salvation to the world and truly live up to the title he fought so hard to embrace: a Jew.

Let us never forget that, as Jews, we were put here as channels for G-dliness, and that when we remain true to ourselves and to Hashem – especially when it seems harder than anything else – unimaginable things can happen...

[1] Story recounted by R' YV Jacobson

*"Speak to Hashem as if He's sitting right beside you  
– because He is." (Meaningful Minute)*

**Refuah Sheleimah, b'toch she'ar cholei Yisrael:**

Ariel Ben Frida   Rahamim Ben Shifra   Nina Bat Fenya   Frida Bat Yaffa   Miriam Bat Bakol   Chana Bat Malka  
Yosef Haim Ben Elana   Avigayil Bat Tehillah   Sara Miriam Bat Dina   Ariella Bat Hila   Yitzhak Ben Naama