

GROWTH

At The

SHABBAT TABLE

7th Edition
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PARSHAT VAYESHEV

Shining Bright

It's no coincidence that, every year, Chanukah falls out around Parshat Vayeshev. There are many deep reasons as to why, but the following is one I thought of and find to be profound.

Towards the end of the Parshah, we read of Yosef being thrown into prison. Under natural circumstances, Yosef would be stuck and doomed for life. However, not only did he get out, but he even rose to greatness from a pit in Egypt to the country's royal throne. How did he do it? What enabled that miraculous promotion?

It was actually just one sentence. One short, easy sentence that so many of us take for granted. Yosef asked his fellow inmates, who were anxious, depressed, and confused: מדוע פניכם רעים היום – *why do you appear downcast today?* It was that initiation that essentially led to him to interpreting their dreams, and eventually Pharaoh's dream, and rising from confinement to royalty. All because he stopped to notice and care about the suffering and pain of someone else...

Chanukah, the holiday of light, is the epitome of this very concept. Of bringing light and hope into a world filled with so much darkness and pain. Of lifting others and igniting their sparks to shine bright.

My Rebbi, R' Mordechai Finkelman, shared that in the Chanukah saga, the Greeks tried defiling our *kedushah* and infiltrating our unique Jewish identity. Unlike Haman, who just wanted to annihilate every last ounce of Jewish blood, the *Yevanim* were fine with our existence, but wanted to destroy our spirituality. They didn't shatter our jugs of oil in the Bet HaMikdash because their goal wasn't to stop us from lighting the Menorah. They went through the trouble of *contaminating* every jug of oil, so that the Menorah would radiate impurity rather than purity. And that is why the custom, in Eretz Yisrael, is to ignite the Chanukah lights outside, by the street, to symbolize a message: "Just as you may try to bring the filth of the street into our homes, we will radiate our light of holiness in the street to spread to the world around us."

That is our mission, and that is the message of Chanukah. You are a Jew, and you were chosen to be an ambassador of Hashem, an emissary of pure light. Don't fool yourself into thinking you can't, or that you don't have what it takes. It can be as simple as smiling to people and lifting those around you. Being there for someone else and helping a person through a tough time can go a long way. Don't believe me? Look at Yosef HaTzaddik...



The Shalsholet

R' YY Jacobson shared a powerful insight. R' Jonathan Sacks wrote that the Hebrew language doesn't have a word for ambivalence, but it does have a musical note for it: the *shalsholet*. There are only 4 times in the Torah where this *ta'am* is used; and Parshat Vayeshev is one of them. R' Yosef Bechor Shor explains that the *shalsholet* represents a state of ambivalence, a state of emotional paralysis; the lack of fortitude, courage, and clarity to forge ahead with decisive, unwavering commitment. That's why the *shalsholet* looks like a zig-zag, representing the back-and-forth of hesitation and procrastination. Even the word, "shalsholet," means *chain*; being stuck. In each rare occasion that the Torah uses this special musical note, there is that state of ambivalence. And in our Parshah, the *shalsholet* is on the word "Vayimaen," where Yosef refuses to succumb to the incessant pleas and demands of Potiphar's wife, to be with her. The Gemara in Yoma describes how she dressed up provocatively 3 different times each day, how she offered him the greatest rewards, and how she threatened him with the most heinous punishments and torture. Yosef refused... but there's a *shalsholet* there. R' Yosef Bechor Shor explains that Yosef refused, but it did not come without profound struggle or without profound battle, as the Gemara (Sota 36) describes that Yosef almost surrendered to Potiphar's wife. Yet, at the last moment, וינס ויצא – he managed to take the courageous step forward and abstained from that moment.

We all have to realize that there are moments in life where we are stuck in that shalsholet, when there are chains of temptation that threaten to hold one down and divide one from his vision and soul. That overwhelming shalsholet is normal; it's part of the fabric of the human psyche. It's at such a moment where one needs to have the vision and clarity of knowing what is healthy and what is unhealthy; what is productive and what is destructive; what has brought benefit before and what has wreaked havoc in your life before. And then to have the courage to say וינס ויצא החוצה ...

*"Until Hashem opens the door,
thank Him in the hallway."*

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

Ariel Ben Frida Frida Bat Yaffa Miriam Bat Bakol Esther Bat Frida Noah Yisrael Ben Yaffa
Rahamim Ben Shifra Yitzchak Ben Naama Michael Rachamim Ben Mazal Amram Ben Rina Fani Alegria