

Vayeishev Drasha, Rabbi David Mahler

I want to share a basic idea gleaned from a close reading of the *pesukim* in this week's *parsha*. It is not a deep or sophisticated *Torah* thought, yet I believe it is an unbelievably crucial message.

Upon *Yosef's* arrival in Egypt, he immediately begins working in the home of *Potifar*, a courtier of *Paroh*. Throughout his year of service there, *Yosef* is incessantly seduced by *Potifar's* wife, yet day after day, he continues to push back her advances. He's alone. He lives in a foreign land many miles from his family. He is in the home of a very important person and he does not succumb to his desire.

Why does he not give into his base desires? How does he not sin?

The *Torah* testifies as to the reason *Yosef* doesn't give in – twice (39:9).

וְאֵיךְ אֶעֱשֶׂה הַרְעָה הַגְּדֹלָה הַזֹּאת וְהִטָּאתִי לְאֵלֵהֶם

Firstly, *Yosef* truly understands that promiscuity and inappropriate relationships are wrong. They are objectionable and out of bounds. Some things are simply reprehensible and repugnant. They are unequivocally abhorrent.

Secondly, his *Emunah* is too strong. His faith in G-d, his *Yirat Shamaim*, doesn't allow him to cross that threshold. He would not risk tarnishing his relationship with *Hashem*.

Rashi informs us that what made *Yosef* recoil at the thought of a potential violation was the image of his father he saw in his mind. *Yaakov's* presence was always with his son. It's a relevant message discussed so often – as parents, we must be mindful that our actions have a profound effect on our children. Our impact affects them not only when we are with them but hopefully lasts for many years – even when they are on their own.

However, it is *Yosef's* final statement that I am obsessed with. *Yosef* states, “*v'chatati l'elokim*” – “How can I sin against G-d.” *Yosef* will not step over the line because it will impinge on his relationship with G-d.

From *Yosef*, that is an amazing statement – because the system let him down.

His mother passed away while he was in his youth. *Yosef* was ridiculed, scoffed at, and almost murdered by his brothers. While *Yosef* lay in a pit, his brothers lounged nearby eating their lunches. Instead of murdering him, they chose to sell him. Those who purchased *Yosef* sold him to others who brought him down to Egypt.

He was then a stranger in a strange land. He was forced to work in someone else's home for a year not once being contacted by his father who loved him so much.

Yosef had every excuse in the book to mail it in. He had every opportunity to blame everyone else. Those who loved him let him down. They didn't protect him. They betrayed him. The adults and older people in his life did not do their jobs.

Despite all this, *Yosef* didn't want to disappoint *Hashem* because he had cultivated his own, unique, personal connection with his G-d.

Yosef didn't turn his back on G-d because of his father's favoritism, his less than average teachers, the *rebbe* who embarrassed him, the long davening, the uninspiring shiurim or *drashot*, the rabbinic scandals or leaders who seem to only be in it for themselves. He stayed *frum* despite anything that was thrown his way whether it be a tuition crisis, a pandemic, or a family tragedy.

His commitment and devotion to *Hashem* transcended any broken part of his life.

Yosef ignored the noise and emphatically decided to believe in the truth; he understood it was up to him to find it and cultivate a meaningful relationship to it.

The *gemara* states that "everything is in the hands of heaven, except for fear (consciousness) of heaven" (*Berachot* 33b). **We** define our religious lives. **We** dictate our investment.

This insight both frightens and motivates me. Our relationship with *Hashem* is up to us.