

Parenting from the Parsha- Parshat Vayeishev- Planting and Building in Chinuch

This week's parsha is action packed, with tons to talk about- particularly when it comes to parenting and sibling/family relationships. But there is one specific part of the parsha that I wanted to focus on- as I believe it has a particularly powerful message for us as parents.

In this weeks parsha, after Yosef is sold by his brothers and arrives in Egypt, he is sold to the house of Potiphar. The Torah describes how Yosef immediately brings much blessing to the house of Potiphar, and becomes his trusted servant, soon becoming Potiphar's second in command. However, together with this success comes the ultimate test- as Potiphar's wife attempts to seduce Yosef. The Torah hints to the tremendous challenge that this created for Yosef- to the point that there is an argument in the gemara as to how close Yosef actually came to succumbing to the temptation. Ultimately, however, Yosef was able to overcome the temptation, and refuses her advances. How was Yosef able to do so? Rashi 39:11 "La'asos" quotes the famous medrash that explains that Yosef was able to overcome her enticement because דמות דיוקנו של אביו נראה אליו, a vision of his father appeared to him, giving him the strength to overcome the temptation.

This medrash and its imagery has always fascinated me- what exactly does it mean that Yaakov's face appeared to Yosef? Is it meant to be taken literally? So some might suggest that what was happening here was classic "Jewish guilt"- that deep in the back of his mind, Yosef knew that if he committed this immoral act, he wouldn't be able to face his father, or he would simply feel guilty because he would be disappointing his father and his legacy. The problem with this approach is that from the perspective of Yosef, he might not ever see his father again, and his connection to his family and their legacy wasn't necessarily relevant to him anymore- so why would he feel guilty?

Rather I believe that the imagery of the Midrash is much deeper- and so much more fundamental to us as parents. Yosef's ability to withstand the temptation wasn't because of a sense of guilt- but rather a deep sense of moral purpose, of right and wrong, that Yaakov had instilled in Yosef. And the greatest test of Yaakov's success as a parent was when Yosef faced the challenge to those values all alone, in a situation when no one else would know- and he was still successful at overcoming the obstacle.

Rav Shlomo Wolbe, in his classic Sefer on Chinuch entitled זריעה ובנין החינוך, talks about two fundamental parallel processes through which parents raise and are mechanech their children- one he calls בנין and the other he calls זריעה. בנין refers to a process by which we "build" or shape our children into the people we want them to be. Similar to the process of building a structure, we play a more active role in trying to form who they are and how they should act. If the child acts in a way that is counter to that vision, that veers from the structure that we have in mind, then our job is to shift him "back in line". However, at the same time there is a second parallel process in chinuch called זריעה. Similar to planting a tree, זריעה refers to the process of planting certain values/ideals/principles within our children from an early age, and allow those values to grow and develop organically.

Proper chinuch, explains Rav Wolbe, requires the proper balance between these two parallel processes. We must cultivate within our children, from a young age, the values and ideals that we feel are important- and then give them to space to allow those values to develop organically . At the same time,

we must continue to build our children as well, taking a more active role in shaping them when the situation arises. As Rav Wolbe poignantly explains, if we raise our kids using solely the medium of **בנין** without the **זריעה**, we would raise robots who do what we tell them to, without those values becoming a part of who they are. If we use **זריעה** without **בנין**, we would raise children who have internalized values, but the values may have veered “out of line”.

As parents, our ultimate goal is to impart our values to our children, and instill them in a way that our children share them not because we force them to, but because these values become a part of them. In this way, they will hopefully keep these values even when they are on their own.

Perhaps we can suggest that this is the true meaning of Yosef seeing the **דמות דיוקנו של יעקב**. Far from being simple guilt, what Yosef saw in his mind’s eye were the values that his father had instilled within him- and that had become a part of him. These values, which Yaakov had instilled through this combination of **זריעה** and **בנין**, empowered Yosef to withstand the incredible temptation, and to live based on the values inculcated within him by his father.

May we merit to successfully integrate both of these methods in our own chinuch- and raise children who live by proper values that have become a part of them- such that they prioritize these values even after they leave our care.

Shabbat Shalom!