

## NEVER ASSUME THAT IT IS IMPOSSIBLE!

### PARSHAS VAYESHEV

*"In 1977, Laura Schultz, 63, was in the kitchen of her home in Tallahassee, Florida, when she heard her 6-year-old grandson screaming from the driveway outside. Schultz ran to the door to find her grandson pinned beneath the rear tire of a full-size Buick. Giving no consideration to limitations or barriers, Schultz ran to the car, used one hand to lift the rear of the vehicle and used the other hand to drag her grandson to safety. Schultz revealed that the incident had scared her and reminded her that she'd wasted most of her life living far beneath her true potential ([Goodreads.com](https://www.goodreads.com))."*

Yosef's brother's convened court and determined that Yosef deserved the death penalty for his actions. They felt that the negative information that Yosef had told Yaakov about them could have potentially led Yaakov to curse the brothers, affecting the destiny of the Jewish people.

Reuven disagreed with the determination and tried to save Yosef by suggesting that instead of killing him themselves, they should throw him into a pit. Reuven had planned to return at a different time to rescue Yosef from the pit. At a later time, when Reuven was away, a caravan of Arabs passed. The caravan was on the way to Egypt. Yehudah suggested to the brothers that they sell Yosef to the Arabs instead of killing him (Bereishis 37:26). The brothers agreed. Yosef was taken out of the pit and sold to the Arabs. **Radak** explains Yehudah's reasoning. Reuven had already prevented the brothers from killing their brother outright. Yehudah was saying "What are we going to do with him? If we leave him in the pit this is just as bad as having killed him."

When the brothers returned home and told Yaakov that Yosef was no longer alive, Yaakov mourned for

*"And it was at that time, that Yehudah descended from his brothers (Bereishis 38:1)."*

his son. He was very anguished and could not be consoled. "And it was at that time, that Yehudah descended from his brothers (Bereishis 38:1)."

**Rashi** explains that the brothers reduced Yehudah from his high position. The **Midrash** (Midrash Rabba

85:2) says when they saw their father's grief they said to Yehudah, "You told us to sell him. Had you had told us to send him back to his father we would also have obeyed you."

The **Talmud** (Sota 13B) quotes Rabbi Elazar who says that one who starts a mitzvah but does not complete it, assuming that he is capable of doing so, is demoted from his position of greatness. **Rashi** explains that Hashem caused Yehudah to be demoted from his position of leadership as a punishment because he started the mitzvah of saving Yosef but did not complete it.

The **Talmud** (Sanhedrin 6B) discusses Yehudah's suggestion to sell Yosef to the Arabs. According to the simple understanding, Rabbi Meir was saying that Yehudah was being criticized. Since Yehudah's brothers showed a willingness to listen to him about selling Yosef, he should have advised them to return Yosef to his father.

**Rav Meir Simcha of Dvinsk** zt"l (Meshech Chachma) gives an interesting understanding for Rabbi Meir. He says that Rav Meir felt that Yosef's brothers from Bilha and Zilpa would not want to see him killed. After all, Yosef associated with them, as the pasuk (Bereishis 37: 2) says, "Yosef was with the sons of Bilhah, and the sons of Zilpah." **Rashi** says that Yosef made it his custom to associate with the sons of Bilhah because his brothers slighted them. That would number 4 people who would vote to free Yosef. Of Leah's 5 sons, Reuven was not present so there would only have been 4 people saying that Yosef deserved to be killed. Once Yehudah would say to free Yosef that would be 5 against 4 and Yosef would have been freed.

**Maharsha** explains Rabbi Meir in the opposite manner. Rabbi Meir was saying the one being criticized was NOT Yehudah. Rather, the one being criticized is anyone one who disgraces Yehudah for what he did. He says that Yehudah acted properly. He acted for the sake of Hashem, in order to spare Yosef's life. He felt that the brothers would not listen to him had he said to free Yosef and return him home. It is interesting to note that the **Torah Temima** understands the **Maharsha** as saying that Yehudah was certain that the brothers would not have listened to him had he said to free Yosef and return him home.

According to the **Maharsha**, and certainly according to the **Torah Temima's** explanation, Yehudah did not think that the brothers would listen to him had he said to free Yosef. Therefore, he did not suggest it.

We have a somewhat similar occurrence, later in Jewish history. The **Talmud** (Gittin 56A-B) relates that Vespasian had been sent by Rome to fight against the Jews and conquer Jerusalem. The Roman legions had surrounded Jerusalem. The great sage

and Torah leader, Rav Yochanan ben Zakkai had to stealthily exit the Jewish camp. When he arrived at the Roman camp, he greeted the general, Vespasian. 'Peace be unto you, O King! Peace be unto you, O King!' Vespasian responded, 'You have incurred the death penalty.... You have called me King, and I am not the King! ...'" Rav Yochanan ben Zakkai answered, 'I knew you had to be a king, because our prophets have foretold that the Temple will fall only into the hands of a king.'" Just then, a messenger arrived from Rome and announced that the Roman Emperor had died, and that Vespasian was chosen to become the new Emperor!" Vespasian was so impressed by Rav Yochanan ben Zakkai that he told him, "I will leave now, to return to Rome. But I will dispatch someone to take my place. Before I go, you may make a request, which I will grant you.'" Rav Yochanan asked for three things, which were granted. He asked that that the Romans guarantee the safety of the scholars of Yavneh, where the new Sanhedrin (Jewish Supreme Court) would be located, that the Romans guarantee the survival of the family of Rabban Gamliel, a descendant of the House of King David, and that the Romans allow their physicians to restore the health of Rabbi Tzadok. Rabbi Tzadok had fasted for forty years to pray for the safety of the city and the Beis HaMikdash. Rabbi Yosef, and some say Rabbi Akiva, questioned Rav Yochanan ben Zakkai's actions. They felt that he should have requested the preservation of Jerusalem and the Beis HaMikdash, and that the Jewish People should be given a "second chance" to prove their loyalty to Rome. Apparently, Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai felt that it was pointless to make that request since the Jews had conducted a multiyear bloody war against the forces of Rome. He understood that asking for too much might gain him nothing. Instead, he asked for the three other things

which, ultimately, ensured the continuity of the Torah and the Jewish People.

Rav Yochanan ben Zakkai knew that had he asked for too much, he would have received nothing. I don't think that Yehudah would have had that problem. I

can't imagine that the other brothers would have said we don't want to free Yosef and because you asked for that we will not even let you sell him to the Arabs.

Yet Yehudah did not ask them to give Yosef his freedom because he was "certain" that they would not listen.

**There are times that we want to say something or do something. Yet, we feel that there is no point because we are certain that our words or actions will be for naught. We feel that the one we want to speak to, will "certainly" not listen to us and will "certainly" not change from what he was doing. We see from Yehudah that we can't assume with 100% certainty. One can never know how his words or actions can affect or influence others. All we do know is that we must always try!**

## **\$25,000 Raffle**

Support our programs educating Jewish children attending public schools.

Only \$36 for 1 ticket, \$60 for 2... [Go to JEPQueens.com](http://JEPQueens.com)

Sponsored In Memory of: Mindel Adina bat Natan Zvi; Shmuel ben Eliezer Lipa; Shirley Shaindel Yaffa bat Yehuda Shmuel; Hadassah bas Yaakov; Faiga bat Pinchas; Yaakov ben Yeshayahu; Gershon ben Hillel; Gita bat Gershon; Rav Chaim Dov Weissmandl ben Rav Yoseph; Shraga Fayvel Leb ben Shmuel Abraham; Moshe ben Yitzchok; Sarah Vital bas Avrohom Yitzchok; R' Yisroel ben R' Yaakov, Zichronam Livracha.

*Rabbi Yaakov Finestone is the director of JEP Queens. For almost 50 years JEP Queens has been in the forefront of kiruv. JEP has changed the lives of thousands of Jewish children enrolled in public schools and kiruv schools. Many are shomrei Torah and mitzvos today because of JEP.*

*To receive these weekly divrei Torah by email, send a request to [jepqueens@gmail.com](mailto:jepqueens@gmail.com)*