

Do Not Stain Your Spark

BY DON JARASHOW

There is no shortage of cultures and ideas in our world today. And while we are the *am hanivchar* and must avoid *chukas hagoyim*, Chazal in Eicha Rabbah still teach: "*Chachma bagoyim taamin*" — if there is wisdom among the nations, learn it.

Marcus Aurelius, the "philosopher-king," ruled from 161–180 CE. Raised in privilege and educated by the finest teachers, he remained disciplined even as emperor, despite wars, plagues, and constant pressure. In his book *Meditations*, he recorded the lessons and habits that shaped him.

As a young nobleman in rough army camps, he was surrounded by soldiers who mocked him and tried to drag him into their immoral lifestyle. But he had been taught to live with integrity and responsibility. Even as a teenager, he refused to lower himself. He later wrote: "A person should never stain the divine spark inside," even when the world pulls him down. From his earliest years, he remembered who he was and what he could become, and the great responsibility he would one day carry as a leader.

THE DIVINE SPARK & OUR INNER IDENTITY

If I may add, we are all leaders. We are leaders of our destiny, leaders of our fate, leaders of our families, and leaders of ourselves. We have to live with this truth—this truth that Marcus Aurelius wrote in *Meditations*: a person should never "stain the divine spark inside." Especially as we go into Chanukah, when we want to live uplifted, ignited with that inner fire, this lesson has never been more relevant. In a world that feels chaotic and upside-down, full of tests and temptations, we need to remind ourselves constantly: Never stain the divine spark inside. Each of us carries a piece of G-d, a *tzelem Elokim*, a *chelek Eloka mimaal*. We must remember who we are, where we come from, where we are going, and what truly matters in life.

YOSEF AND THE POWER OF VAYIMAEN

On the topic of *nisyonos*, and especially overcoming them, in this week's parshah Yosef is challenged with one of the most difficult tests of all time, the *nisayon* of Eishes Potiphar.

Yosef's response, expressed in one word, now very famous, was *Vayimaen*.

וימאן ויאמר אל אשת אדני: הן
אדני לא ידע אתי מה בבית וכל
אשר ישלח נתן בידי.

He refused. He said to his master's wife, "Look, with me here, my master gives no thought to anything in this house, and all that he owns he has placed in my hands."

The word *vayimaen* simply means "he refused." But how exactly did he refuse? What did he say or do?

The Midrash Rabbah sheds light on this:

Yosef told her that Hashem has a pattern of choosing the beloved ones of his father's house for special missions. To Avraham, He said, "Take your son." Yosef thought, if I listen to you, perhaps Hashem would choose me for such a mission, and I would be disqualified because of sin.

Another explanation:

Yosef said that Hashem has a pattern of appearing to the beloved ones of

**"Never stain the
divine spark
inside—you are
much, much
greater than
that."**

CORPORATE SPONSORS



לענין
נח רפאל ז"ל בן ר' יוסף חיים הכהן
שמואל צבי בן בנימין הכהן ז"ל
משפחת ירשוב

לעילוי נשמת MY GRANDPARENTS

שמואל צבי בן בנימין הכהן ירשוב ע"ה
ואשתו
חיה בת אברהם יצחק ע"ה



Dedicated by the Streicher Family (Brooklyn, NY) in honor of our father Reb Simcha Yosef ben Moshe Zev haLevi on his 25th yahrtzeit. Simcha was true to his name and always had a complement for everyone.

To receive this publication and audio or for dedication opportunities, contact don@lechtech.org or 845-367-2959



his father's house at night. To Avraham it says, "After these things, the word of Hashem came to Avram in a vision." To Yitzchak, "Hashem appeared to him that night." To Yaakov, "He dreamed, and behold, a ladder." Yosef thought, if I listen to you, perhaps Hashem would appear to me and find me impure.

The Midrash is telling us that Yosef's refusal was by telling her that Hashem chooses the beloved ones of his father's house for great missions, like Avraham being told "*Kach na es bincha*," and if he sinned he could lose that merit. He also said that Hashem appears to Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov at night, and if he listened to her, Hashem might appear and find him *tamei*. His refusal came from protecting that lineage and closeness.

KNOWING ONE'S WORTH

The glaring question which Rav Yankel Galinsky points out is that Yosef's response seems bewildering. Imagine a hostage, *rachmana litzlan*, telling his captor: "You should really let me go, because I can't keep mitzvos, I can't keep Shabbos, I can't put on tefillin, I can't daven or learn Torah." That would sound absurd, right? The captor couldn't care less about the hostage's mitzvah observance. That's exactly what the captor wants – for him to be despondent weak, broken, disconnected.

It's the same here. Potiphar's wife wants to corrupt Yosef, to have him sin in the gravest way possible, to fall to the lowest level. She wants him to commit the worst sin. And how does Yosef respond? He talks about his holy family, his father, his ancestors, and their connection to Hashem. At first glance, it seems completely off the mark, and totally irrelevant. What type of response is this?

Rav Yankel answers based on Rabbeinu Yonah's *Shaarei Avodah* who writes:

The first key is that a person serving Hashem should know his own value and recognize his merits, as well as the merits, greatness, and importance of his ancestors before Hashem. He benefits from this, because when a desire or pride arises in his heart to do something improper, he feels shame for himself and shame for his ancestors. He restrains himself and says: "I am a great and important person today. I have many high and noble qualities, and I am the son of great people, of the kings of old. How could I commit such a terrible sin and wrong Hashem and my ancestors all my life?" But if, heaven forbid, he does not recognize his own value or the value of his ancestors, it will be easy for him to follow corrupt ways and indulge his desires like a wicked person.

Accordingly, we can understand Yosef's response. He knew his own worth and the greatness of his ancestors—Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov. That awareness gave him strength. When faced with temptation, he felt shame at the thought of betraying his family's holiness and mission. In effect he said, "I am a person of worth,

part of a holy lineage. How could I commit such a sin and dishonor Hashem and my ancestors?"

Because Yosef understood his value, the temptation held no power. What seems like a lofty answer was actually the most practical defense: He anchored himself in identity, lineage, and purpose.

This gives us depth and insight into how the *yetzer hara* can be fought. One way is to go head-on: Say no, recognize that it's impure, understand that it's not good for your eternity, not good for your *olam haba*, not good for your *ruchnius*, not good for your connection with Hashem. And while all of this is all 100% true, sometimes in the moment it's hard to focus on what it's not, because the temptation still feels so real and strong.

Yosef's strategy was different. He focused inwardly on his own greatness and self-value. By anchoring himself in his identity and mission, he was able to resist the most difficult temptation. This is the approach we can learn from him, using our awareness of our own potential and purpose to fight the challenges and temptations of the world.

THE PRINCE IN THE CARRIAGE

Rav Shlomo of Karlin captures this message with a *mashal*:

A young prince dressed in silk, a golden sash, and shining shoes rode in a grand carriage. As he traveled, he saw broken homes, crooked chimneys, and people in tattered clothing. His heart ached for them.

Then he saw boys his own age rolling in thick, black mud. They laughed and shouted, covered head to toe. For a moment, he wanted to join them, to feel carefree and playful. But one look at his silk garments and golden sash reminded him that he was different. His life had purpose. He was meant for something higher, for royalty.

Just like Yosef and the prince, we learn that true strength comes from knowing who we are and the purpose we were given. Temptation will always try to pull us toward what is easy, fun, or immediate. But our identity, values, and mission can anchor us. Yosef shows us that when we remember our worth, our family, and our connection to Hashem, we can rise above the pull of the world. We can act with courage, integrity, and clarity, stand firm in our purpose, honor our lineage, and let our light, the *tzelem Elokim* within us, guide us even when the world and its tests try to drag us into the mud.

Never stain the divine spark inside. You are much, much greater than that. •

"True strength comes from knowing who we are and the purpose we were given."

