

# CHIZUK & IDUD

*Divrei Torah from the weekly sedra*

*with a focus on living in Eretz Yisrael*

*Chizuk for Olim & Idud for not-yet-Olim*

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*Ramat Shiloh, Beit Shemesh*

## Vayeishev

Every year as we read Parshat Vayeishev, I am wont to repeat a Dvar Torah I heard more than fifty years ago from my beloved Rebbe at YU, Rabbi Avigdor Cyperstein zt"l.

Rabbi Cyperstein began with the following story: "A Roman matron once said to Rav Yossi that she could believe the whole Torah as being true, except for one single episode which she felt could not have possibly taken place as reported in the Bible. She was unwilling to accept the story of Yosef and Potifar's wife: "When a beautiful woman sets her eyes on a young man", the matron proceeded, "and attempts to seduce him, it is impossible for him to successfully withstand her womanly wiles." How then is it that Yosef did not succumb? From whence did he draw the immense spiritual and moral resolve needed to emerge intact from his predicament? The Rabbis tell us that indeed Yosef had initially entered the house with the intention to do "his work" with Potifar's wife,

and yet at the ultimate moment he beheld his father's image, and this picture provided him with the strength to run away (Rashi 39:11). This Midrash seems to suggest that it was the moral, or ethical, credo which his father had successfully instilled within him, which ultimately saved the day.

My Rebbe quoted a parallel suggestion found in the Yerushalmi (Horayot 2:5; B'reishit Rabba 98:24), wherein Yosef's actions are attributed not to his having envisioned his father's countenance but rather that of his mother Rachel. What saved the day was not the memory of a philosophical construct or legalistic code; in order to counterbalance the attraction of the physical beauty of Potifar's wife, spiritual beauty was needed.

Potifar's wife symbolized the sanctification of physical beauty, while Rachel Imeinu personified a competing ideal: Deep appreciation of the beauty inherent in holiness. The Egyptian world, like the Greeks later on, worshiped physical beauty. While Yosef, and later on the Maccabees, were enchanted by the beauty in the sublime, the allure of the lights of the Menorah. To counteract the fatal attraction of Kedushat HaYofi -the sanctification

of physical beauty - Rachel's image reminded Yosef of the charm of "Yofi Shel Kedusha", the beauty of sanctity.

Yosef's battle, in which Rachel's image serves such an important role, is still being fought today. Can we succeed, as a minority culture within Western society, to overcome the attraction of the values and mores of the majority culture which are at times so averse and antithetical to our own? Yosef had his Mother's and Father's countenance to accompany him, but the alarmingly high rates of intermarriage all over the world, indicate that we are currently losing the battle...

Many visit Kever Rachel in order to pray, to be inspired by her memory and draw strength from her spiritual image, knowing as we do that Rachel refuses to be comforted for her children (plural), crying that we may yet return home, KI EINENU (for he is not yet here - singular), Yirmiyahu 31:15-17. Rachel does not cry for us as a collective, but rather, like every mother, she weeps over each and every one of her children. Seeing the unique characteristics of each and every one of her children she will not forsake them, hoping that even the most distant will ultimately return home.

The Almighty answers Rachel telling her to: "refrain from weeping and your eyes from tears for your children will come back from the land of the enemy. There is hope for the future, your children shall return to their own border - V'SHAVU VANIM LIGVULAM.

Rachel is buried "by the way" to enable her to beseech the Almighty on behalf of her children in exile (Rashi on B'reishit 48:7).

We have to strive to make Rachel's tears, our own. Rachel, the symbol of the Shechina, is with us in Galut.

We can help bring her home by resolving to come home ourselves.

**V'SHAVU VANIM LIGVULAM** 🕯️🕯️