



Season of Heroes

Dear Parents,

Erev Shabbos Parashas Vayeishev 5780

This is the season of heroes. Between the heroes of this week's *Parsha*, *Yosef* and *Tamar*, the heroes of the *Chanuka* saga – the *Chashmonaim*, and the heroes of our times - modern day parents raising a Torah family - we can learn and be inspired to greater heroism, strength and fortitude.

What all these heroes have in common is their rising above the many rationalizations that they could have justifiably brought to bear to excuse their behavior had they chosen to not follow the path of courage and heroism.

Yosef was faced with the extraordinary trial of *Aishes Potiphar*, seduction at the hands of his master's wife (*Bereishis 39:7-13*). He could have easily rationalized that he was torn away from his family and roots at a young age, alone in a land of immorality, how could he defy her when his livelihood was at stake? How could he be expected to be so holy when his older brothers were ready to commit murder (of *Yosef*)?

Tamar was prepared to give up her life and that of her unborn twins to avoid embarrassing *Yehuda* (*Bereishis 38:25, Brachos 43B*). Add to that the fact that one of the twins was to be the progenitor of the *Malchus Beis Dovid* (Davidic dynasty) and ultimately *Mashiach*. She could easily have rationalized that this was too great a price to pay for preserving another's honor.

The *Chashmonaim* were not under previous obligation to leave their homes and start a rebellion. They were faced with the same challenges as everyone else. They could have rationalized that they were doing the best they can, that they would ignore the Hellenists and Greeks as long as possible. When it turned out that the Greeks were just too powerful to ignore they could have justified giving up and going along with the prevailing culture.

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Modern day parents who cling to the Torah, who gladly sacrifice financial advancement to bear the burden that *frum* Jews bear are modern day heroes. This is especially true when the *Mesiras Nefesh* includes providing a (costly) Torah education to their children. Keeping *Shabbos* is not a question. Without even realizing it, these parents reject the many rationalizations that could be made to justify a different course in life.

When we are faced with challenges, our conscious thought usually goes immediately to justify taking the easy way out. When we know we should be eating healthy, how does it happen that we consume an entire pint of ice cream? When we fully believe we should be attending minyan, how do we end up not getting up in time? The answer is – we rationalize. We find a good reason to justify our failure to do what we really know is the right thing to do.

What many consider the challenge of our generation – digital distraction and internet overexposure also brings out the rationalizations. There are dozens of legitimate reasons why we need to be so preoccupied with our devices. We need it for *Parnassah*, for learning, for *Chesed*, for safety, etc. etc. However, do we need it all the time? Do we need it unfiltered? Do our children need it?

The overwhelming majority of children who grow up in our homes remain *Shomer Shabbos* throughout life. Why? Because they grew up in a home, and saw parents who could have rationalized away the need for strict *Shabbos* observance yet chose not to. The justifications of *Parnassah*, social status and convenience were all brushed aside because there was a stronger conviction. Witnessing and experiencing this 'heroism' makes a deep and lasting impact on children.

When considering what to do about technology, we need to understand that the same forces that apply to *Shemiras Shabbos* apply in this realm. Justifications abound, but can we muster up a deeper conviction, that our children's future health, cognitive ability and spiritual strength are riding on our decisions and actions? When we show strength in this area, we directly enhance our children's ability to stand strong and act heroically.

May the heroes of the *Chanuka* season inspire us to think clearly, feel inspired and act courageously. Our children are watching and learning.

Best wishes for an uplifting Shabbos and illuminating Chanuka,

Rabbi Kalman Baumann

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