



RABBI AARON

Editor, Torah Tidbits

GOLDSCHIEDER

A Thundering 'No'

The Torah contains musical notes. Every word is sung whenever the Torah is read publicly. These musical notes, passed down from Moshe throughout the generations, are extremely meticulous and significant. They often expose us to the word's or sentence's depth that we would have never appreciated from the word or sentence themselves.

One of the rarest and most unusual musical notes in the Torah is known as the *shalsholet*. It is this note which appears in the episode of Yosef's refusal to succumb to the advances of his master's wife that sparked the interest of Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik zt"l.

The story is well known. Potiphar chooses Yosef to become a slave in his household. There, Yosef attracts the lustful imagination of his master's wife. She desperately tries

to engage him in a relationship, yet he steadfastly refuses her.

This is the Torah's description:

"Yosef was well-built and handsome in his appearance. After a while, his master's wife took notice of Yosef and said, 'Come to bed with me.' But he refused. He said: 'With me in charge my master does not concern himself with anything in the house; everything he owns he has entrusted to my care. No one is greater in this house than I am. My master has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?' (Bereishit 39:6-9).

On the verb *va'yemaen*, 'but he refused,' is found a *shalsholet*, the thrice-repeating musical note.

In order to understand its significance, Rabbi Soloveitchik first commented on an intriguing detail in the narrative, concerning the way the Torah reports Yosef's response to his master's wife

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proposition. When his master's wife asks him to lay with her, we would expect Yosef to first explain to her why he cannot accept her offer, and then conclude by saying no. Yet, the Torah tells us that the first thing Yosef does was to refuse her. Only afterwards does he justify his refusal. Why?

How did Yosef overcome this enormous temptation?

Aware of the profound danger that he might fall prey to immoral behavior, the first thing Yosef did was present the woman with a thundering "no". The cantillation of a *shalsholet* is in the configuration of a chain. His refusal stemmed from the unbroken chain of previous generations, the *shalsholet hamesorah* - his genealogy, his patrilineal descent - which impelled him to declare his refusal to be seduced without furnishing logic or explanation.

In this context Rabbi Soloveitchik took note of another unusual feature in this pasuk - the use of a *p'sik* (*diving line*). The two words, *va'yemaen*, and *he refused*, and *vayomer*, and *he said*, are distinct

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and separate; they are divided by a line which signals that the two words are not connected. In other words, Yosef's refusal and explanation do not constitute a cause-and-effect relationship. The word, *va'yemaen* is an expression of unwillingness, of demurral without any reason ('A Fire In His Soul, Bunim', p.366, *Mesorat HaRav Chumash, Beresheis* p.292).

Throughout the generations the resoluteness of the Jew and his ability to declare without hesitation or compromise - *va'yemaen* - has been the secret to the Jewish nation's survival.

The Rav cited great sages from our past such as Rabbi Chanina ben Teradyon and Rabbi Akiva who refused to accommodate the enemy in the face of the pressure to forsake the Almighty and His law. During the era of Roman persecution they would assemble groups together to study Torah. These actions were not rooted in logic or reason; it was an instinctive reaction.

Rabbi Soloveitchik elaborated on this theme and said what was true of the great sages in our history was often also true of the 'simple Jew' who exhibited this

same exquisite trait. "The martyrs of the Jewish people who sacrificed their lives for the glory of God during the infamous periods of forced conversion were not always the scholars, rabbis, or preeminent *halachic* authorities. Dormant in the soul of the simple Jews lay engraved the trait of *va'yemaen*. The Jewish instinct drove and impelled them to sacrifice themselves for *kiddush Hashem*." (*Mesorat HaRav Chumash, Bereishis*, p. 293)

This notion that there is inherent, or an instinctive, attachment to the Divine embedded in the soul of every Jew is exquisitely stated in a noteworthy passage that was dear to Rabbi Soloveitchik and would often draw upon in his philosophical teachings. In the 19th chapter of the Tanya, the first Rebbe of Lubavitch contends that even the simplest Jew, when he faces a test challenging his faith, is propelled by his *neshama* to respond to the test. That simple Jew, "without any reasoning, knowledge, or intelligence that may be comprehended by him, prevails over the *kelipah* and the temptations of the world....and chooses God as his portion and his lot, yielding to Him his soul, in order to sanctify his name (*Likutei Amarim* Chapter 19). ■

WEEKLY INSPIRATION

'Everyone must know
That within burns a candle
No one's candle is like his or hers fellow's candle
No one lacks their own candle
Everyone must know,
That it is their task to reveal their light to the world
To ignite it until it is a great flame
And to illuminate the universe.'

Rav Avraham Yitzchak HaKohen Kook zt"l