



FROM THE DESK OF RABBI MOSHE HAUER



OU Executive Vice President

Moral Strength

Our environment poses a constant challenge with regard to our morality, specifically with regard to the core Jewish values of modesty and sanctity in the intimate realm. We are surrounded by what appears to be an ever-intensifying emphasis on the seductive and a continuous erosion of boundaries. This is not new for the Jewish people and was in fact a core element of the Chanukah story where many sources identify the decree of the Greeks to violate young brides, תיבעל להגמון תחילה ('Prima Nocta'), as the trigger to the revolt of the Chashmonaim.

The Torah refers to such immoral behavior as מעשה ארץ מצרים, characteristic of the Egyptians. During our first encounter with Egypt, Sarah was taken to be with Pharaoh on account of her beauty. And in this week's

Parsha Yosef faces the very same challenge from the wife of Potiphar. While Sarah was subject to force and compulsion, Yosef had to deal with seduction and temptation.

Yosef withstood the challenge, earning for himself the title יוסף הצדיק, "Yosef the Righteous". He resisted the challenge by the power of his fidelity to the trust placed in him by Potiphar (אינו גדול בבית הזה ממני), his commitment to uphold the values he had seen at home (דמות דיוקנו של אביו), and his faithfulness to G-d's word (וחטאתי לאלקים). It was his moral strength that would set the tone for the Jewish people's exile in Egypt, where they would resist their environment and remain faithful to their values in this precious realm.

We are no longer in Egypt and the Greeks are long gone as a force to be reckoned with, yet the moral challenge they posed continues to confront us. Like Yosef and the Chashmonaim, we will overcome this challenge by strengthening our commitment to interpersonal trust, loyalty to tradition, and faithfulness to G-d's word. ■

בס"ד

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