



God is Holding Our Hand

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This past week I had an opportunity to attend a lecture by Rabbi Harold Kushner as part of Jewish Book Month. Rabbi Kushner was speaking about his book, [Conquering Fear](#). As I re-read the book and listened to Rabbi Kushner's words, I thought of this week's Torah Portion, *Vayeshev*, in which Joseph is put in many compromising situations.

The *parsha* begins with Joseph, a dreamer, sharing his dreams with his parents and brothers. The dreams anger the brothers who in turn plot to do him harm. When they are out in the field, away from their parents, the brothers throw Joseph into a pit, then sell him to a group of Midianites (who in turn sell him to Egypt).

As Joseph was in the pit, he did not seem afraid. I find it interesting that the verse (Gen. 37:24) states that the pit was both empty and had no water in it. Why not simply say the pit was empty? Why is it important that the pit lacked water?

According to the Biblical commentator [Elijah Mizrahi](#), though the pit was empty of water, it did contain poisonous snakes. Joseph's survival in the pit was an act of God (had his brothers known this, he may never have been sold). From this, one could argue that the pit was not "empty" -- God was with Joseph.

As the *parsha* progresses, Joseph works for Potiphar and becomes very successful in his household, only to lose his position when Potiphar's wife tries unsuccessfully to seduce him.

Again, Joseph finds himself in a pit, a prison. The Torah says that "Hashem was with Joseph and endowed him with charisma" (Gen. 39:21). Even in prison, Joseph was not alone -- God was with him.

As Rabbi Kushner ended his talk, he entertained questions from the audience, one of which really stuck out: When it is 2:00am and your child hasn't come home yet or when a loved one has been diagnosed with cancer, how should one pray?

These are the same questions that Yaakov may have asked when Joseph did not come home from the field. They are the questions that parents and loved ones ask daily. The answer that Rabbi Kushner gave was one that had a profound impact on me.

Rabbi Kushner talked about his chaplaincy work from early in his career. This was an aspect of his Rabbinate that was the hardest for him. He did not know what to say to someone who lay in a hospital bed, or to the patient's family. He related how one of his mentors told him that sometimes it is enough just to hold their hands and not say a word.

This is what we need to ask of God when we pray – not that God will answer each one of our prayers, but that God will hold our hands.

As part of our Middle School *T'fillah* rotation, we have introduced creative opportunities for students to connect to the concepts of prayer. This past week we introduced *minyanim* that incorporated trigger films, short stories and music. I have the opportunity to work with students in the Music *Minyan*. Each of the students was asked to bring in a song that dealt with the concept of love.

I invited the students to share their songs and together we listened and looked at the lyrics in order to draw a connection to our *T'fillot*. The lyrics of three songs have stuck with me as examples of how Joseph overcame his fear and how he realized that God was always with him.

*I don't know you
But I want you
All the more for that
Words fall through me
And always fool me
And I can't react
And games that never amount
To more than they're meant
Will play themselves out*

*Falling slowly, eyes that know me
And I can't go back
Moods that take me and erase me
(“[Falling Slowly](#)” by, Glen Hansard, from the soundtrack to Once)*

*Don't let your mind get weary and confused
Your will be still, don't try
Don't let your heart get heavy child
Inside you there's a strength that lies*

*Don't let your soul get lonely child
It's only time, it will go by
Don't look for love in faces, places
It's in you, that's where you'll find kindness*

*Be here now, here now
Be here now, here now*

*Don't lose your faith in me
And I will try not to lose faith in you
Don't put your trust in walls
'Cause walls will only crush you when they fall*

*Be here now, here now
Be here now, here now*

("Be Here Now" by Ray LaMontagne)

*And I've always lived like this
Keeping a comfortable, distance
And up until now
I had sworn to myself that I'm
Content with loneliness
Because none of it was ever worth the risk
Well, You, are, the only exception
And I'm on my way to believing
Oh, And I'm on my way to believing
(["The Only Exception"](#) by Paramore)*

We often feel alone. Whether it is when we are down in the pits, or waiting for good news about a loved one. Sometimes we need someone to just hold our hand, to tell us that we are loved. When those times are in front of us, we must remember, as Joseph did, that God is holding our hand.

AS A FAMILY:

- Pick your favorite song and look at the lyrics. How can you apply those lyrics to your relationship with God? Prayer? Thanksgiving?
- Visit the sick. Sit and hold someone's hand and let them know that you are there.

TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THIS WEEK'S PARSHA, ANSWER THESE QUESTIONS:

1. What does Yaakov give to Joseph? Why?
2. What happened in Joseph's first dream?
3. What happened in Joseph's second dream?
4. How does Joseph find his brothers? Where does he find them?
5. Who tries to save Joseph from the pit?
6. What do the brothers say to Yaakov?
7. Who is Tamar?
8. What lesson does Tamar teach to Judah?
9. Who does Joseph meet in jail? What does he tell each of them?