

WISDOM IN ACTION

by Rabbi Label Lam

Now it came about when she spoke to Yosef day in and day out, that he did not obey her... to be with her. And it came about on a certain day, that he came to the house to do his work, and none of the people of the house were there in the house. So she grabbed him by his garment, saying, "Lie with me!" But he left his garment in her hand and fled and went outside. (Breishis 39:10-12)

Opportunity may knock only once, but temptation leans on the doorbell. (Anonymous) his father's image appeared, Yosef HaTzadik earns his wings with this display of heroism. He is titled a Tzadik! The sea splits for the Nation of Israel in his honor, for this single act of resistance. However, when we read Rashi a troubling question jumps out. There is an opinion that he actually came to be with her but his father's image appeared to him. It looks like he was ready to cave in until he was magically saved, bailed out by a sudden appearance of the image of his holy father. What was his input to merit such honor?

There was a psychological study done in 1970 at Stanford University known as the "Marshmallow Study". The purpose of the original study was to understand when the control of deferred gratification, the ability to wait to obtain something that one wants, develops in children. The experiment took place at a Nursery School with children age 4 to 6 as subjects.

The children were led into a room, empty of distractions, where a treat of their choice (Oreo cookie, marshmallow, or pretzel stick) was placed on a table, by a chair. The children could eat the marshmallow, the researchers said, but if they waited for fifteen minutes without giving in to the temptation, they would be rewarded with a second marshmallow. Some would "cover their eyes with their hands or turn around so that they can't see the tray, others start kicking the desk, or tug on their pigtails, or stroke the marshmallow as if it were a tiny stuffed animal", while others would simply eat the marshmallow as soon as the researchers left.

In over 600 children who took part in the experiment, a minority ate the marshmallow immediately. Of those who attempted to delay, one third deferred gratification long enough to get the second marshmallow. Age was a major determinant of deferred gratification. As the children who participated in life were followed into adulthood, surprise- surprise, it was discovered that the ones who had shown resistance to temptation, had actually achieved more and gone on to live more successful lives.

The results of the study should not come as any surprise to us. The experiment actually tested

exactly whether the child's animal soul, which can only grasp and be grasped by present tangible stimuli is going to be the dominant force or whether the G-dly soul, the intellect, is able to override the sirens of temptation. Now we can wonder, from where did Yosef summon the spiritual strength for his test of extreme temptation!?

The story is told that the Sanzer Rav asked a Chassid that was passing by his window what he would do if he found a wallet with some money inside and the wallet had a clear sign indicating the owner. The fellow responded dutifully, "I would return it!" "Fool!" exclaimed the Rebbe. The next fellow when questioned answered, "Why I would keep it!" "Thief!" cried the Rebbe. A third gentleman said, "I don't know what I would do, Rebbe, but I hope and pray I would have the moral resolve and strength to do the right thing and return it." "That man" the Rebbe agreed, "is truly wise."

Yosef was not visited, magically or mysteriously with some Macbethian ghost like visage of his holy father, in the nick of time. He had prepared his whole life, installing this image in his mind. All the while he was away from home he labored to keep that picture front and center, as his screen saver, so as not to disappointment himself by doing that which his father would never agree to. Not only is that authentic honoring of one's father but it's also **wisdom in action**. DvarTorah, Copyright © 2007 by Rabbi Label Lam and [Torah.org](https://torah.org).