

Temple Israel
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The Proverbial Ditch

This past Saturday evening my family and my parents, who were visiting from Columbus, decided to go to Starry Nights at Shelby Farms. At 6:30 PM, driving from Humphreys to Walnut Grove, we, like hundreds of other cars lined up to see the festive lights in the city's preeminent park. The line on Walnut Grove, we thought would move quickly; however, slowly it crept a few feet every ten minutes.

Since seeing the lights was not anyone's highest priority, we decided to turn around and head for home. Moments previous to this decision, we passed a level, safe area for our van to cross over Walnut Grove and immediately be on our way. However, less than 100 yards ahead of us laid another flat gravel path to turn around. In between these very safe options, as many of you might know, lies a grassy trench.

Instead of patiently waiting ten minutes and about 100 yards, I decided, to the chagrin of my wife, to make a U-turn down and, in theory, up, the grassy path onto the other side. On the face of it, this idea seemed to be flawless. The trajectory of the van combined with the small hills seemed like a simple feat. Regrettably, in practice, this was not the case! While the van definitely made it down the grassy slope, it never made it back up. Rather, the van's tires lodged into the muddy basin below causing us, Amy, my one and three year old daughters, my parents and I, to be trapped in a ditch.

We live in a society where impatience is the motto and patience the exception, not the rule. Think about it -- how many times has a line at a grocery store, a bank or a Tennessee DMV annoyed us? How many times have we inched up in our cars to prevent someone else from coming into our lane? How many times have we been short with other people in order to rush to another appointment? In these circumstances we personify the white rabbit from the Disney classic, "Alice In Wonderland," "I'm late, I'm late for a very important date, No time to say "Hello", "Goodbye," I'm late, I'm late, I'm late, I'm

late.” Unfortunately, this impatience can lead all of us into the proverbial trench. How then can we limit our frustrations and accept our circumstance?

Over the past few weeks, we have read the story of Joseph and his brothers. In the ultimate and despicable act of envy, the brothers trap Joseph in a ditch and sell him into slavery. This week we study *vayiggash* where Joseph finally reveals himself to his brothers. In this moment of Joseph’s disclosure, there the brothers stood powerless to control what would happen next. Joseph could react with great wrath and vengeance causing a broken family to become even more distant. However, in Hebrew, Joseph states:

Now, do not be distressed or reproach yourselves because you sold me hither, it was to save life that sent me ahead of you.
(Genesis 45:5)

With compassion rather than anger, Joseph calmly accepts his brothers’ failings, which leads to the reconciliation of their differences and a closer bond than before.

Being patient with others and situations involves asking and answering questions like “why are we acting with disdain or insensitivity,” “what prevents us from accepting others failings with compassion,” and “what do we gain from our impatience?”

In returning to the story of the ditch, my impatient actions led to quite a predicament. Defenseless and humbled, I sat, waiting for the angry exclamation “what were you thinking,” the snide comment like “another fantastic evening in a ditch,” or the simple, but effective silent treatment. However, none of these came.

Instead of becoming impatient or getting angry at my plan’s obvious weakness, Amy and my parents -- to their credit -- controlled their dismay and accepted our calamitous position. Later that evening, when we were finally towed to safety, we laughed at the story. My family will never forget the last night of Hanukkah of 2009, not just because we were lodged in a ditch, but also because through patience we became closer as a family.