

Rivky and the Big Wave

A story about strong feelings and getting back to calm

Rivky has been working on her model of the Beis Hamikdash for three weeks. Toothpick pillars, tiny gold paper, a courtyard made of cardboard. It is due on Monday. On Thursday afternoon she comes home from school, drops her bag, and walks into the living room.

Her little brother Shmuli is sitting in the middle of the carpet. The Beis Hamikdash is next to him, and the front gate is in his hand, broken in two.

Rivky feels it before she thinks it. A wave starts in her stomach, climbs up her chest, and heats her face. Her hands curl into fists. "WHAT DID YOU DO?" she shouts, so loud that the neighbors might hear. Shmuli's lip begins to shake.

There is a part of Rivky that knows she is about to say words she cannot take back. It is a small part, far away, like a person calling from the other side of a loud street. She has just enough room to hear it. "Go," says the small part. "Not yet. Go somewhere else first."

Rivky turns and walks fast into the hallway. She does not slam the door. She does not shout one more word. Her chest is going up and down like she ran a race. She stands at the sink in the bathroom and runs cold water over her wrists, the way her aunt showed her once.

The cold feels sharp and clear. Rivky counts her breath. In for four, out for six, longer on the way out. The wave is still huge. But a wave that is going out always gets smaller than it was at the top. She does it five times. Six. Her fists open.

Now she can think. The gate is broken. The model is not ruined. Shmuli is five years old and he looked scared, not proud. Rivky does not feel happy. She still feels angry, and she can let herself be angry. What she does not have to do is let the anger decide every word.



Mommy is standing in the hallway when Rivky comes out. She does not say, "Calm down." She says, "That looked like a big one. Do you want to tell me, or do you want a few more minutes?" Rivky takes the few minutes. Then she tells her. Her voice shakes, but it is her own.

Together they find Shmuli under the dining room table. "I only wanted to see how the door opened," he whispers. Rivky takes a long breath. "I am still upset," she says. "But I should not have shouted at you like that. Next time, please ask me first. I will show you how the door works."

It takes an hour of glue and patience to fix the gate. It does not look perfect. Shmuli holds the pieces and Rivky presses them together. It is not magic and it is not a perfect ending. But when she hangs the little paper doors on Sunday night, she knows something about herself. Even a very big wave can pass without knocking everything over.

Rivky's Calm Plan

Notice the wave early. Hot face, tight fists and fast breath are clues that a big feeling is rising.

Step away first. Leave the room, without slamming or saying more, before the words come out.

Help your body. Cold water on your wrists, or breathing in for four and out for six, can make the wave smaller.

Come back and repair. When you are calm, say what you felt, say what you will do differently, and help fix what you can.

Feelings can be big. You still choose what to do with them.