

Yossi and the Wobbly Voice

A story about doing something that matters even when you feel nervous

Yossi has a dvar Torah to give at the Shabbos table. His class is doing a family project, and everyone has a part. His part is two minutes. Two minutes is not long. But when he thinks about standing up with his Zaidy, his cousins and the whole long table looking at him, his mouth goes dry.

All week Yossi tries to make the nervous feeling go away. He drinks water. He practices in the mirror twenty times. He tells himself, "Stop being nervous. There is nothing to be nervous about." It does not work. The more he tries to push the feeling away, the louder it gets.

On Thursday night, he tells his big sister Leah. "I want to not feel like this." Leah thinks. "What if you do not have to get rid of it? What if the nervous feeling is just along for the ride?" Yossi frowns. "Along for the ride where?"

"To the dvar Torah," says Leah. "You get to pick what you do. The feeling gets to come too, but it does not get to drive." She asks him a question that surprises him: "Why do you care about giving it at all?"

Yossi has to think about that. Nobody is making him choose the hardest part. He chose it because Zaidy has been telling the same story for years, and Yossi found something new in it. He wants Zaidy to hear it. That is the thing that matters to him. It matters more than looking smooth.

On Friday evening, the table is full. Yossi's knees feel like jelly. His voice, when he starts, comes out wobbly and thin. He hears the shake. The old Yossi would have stopped. The new Yossi says to himself, "There you are, wobbly voice. Come along." Then he keeps going.

He says the first sentence, then the second. His hands are still trembling a little. A cousin coughs. The wobble in his voice does not disappear. But somewhere in the

middle he forgets to watch it, because he is thinking about Zaidy's face. Zaidy has stopped chewing. He is leaning forward.

When Yossi finishes, the table is quiet for one breath, and then Zaidy says, "I never thought of it that way." Yossi feels a warm, loose feeling spread through his chest. His voice was shaky for the entire two minutes. And it did not matter at all.

Later he tells Leah, "It was still wobbly the whole time." Leah grins. "And you still did it." Yossi realizes he has learned something. Nervous does not mean stop. He can feel nervous and do the thing that matters, both at once.

Yossi's Take-It-Along Tool

Notice the feeling. Say, "I notice I feel nervous." You do not have to fight it.

Ask what matters. Why do you want to do this? Think of the person or the value that makes it worth it.

Let the feeling come along. A nervous feeling can ride in the back seat. You are the one who picks the next step.

Take one step that matters. Start with the first sentence. Then the next. Shaky is okay.

You can feel nervous and still do what matters to you.