

Elie Wiesel once said, “People become the stories they hear and the stories they tell.” I think this quote says an awful lot in the small sentence that it is.

Good evening. My name is Avrel Festinger and I’m a grade 7 student at Vancouver Talmud Torah. This evening I will talk about how stories, and storytelling, connect to Judaism.

“People become the stories they hear and the stories they tell”. Elie Wiesel’s words tell us that we find who we are, in the stories we tell. For me, Judaism, books, writings and stories are a major part of who I am.

Think back to some of the books you’ve read. Many books, and their stories, have one thing in common: morals. Sometimes the moral is hidden; sometimes it is in plain view.

We find many stories with morals in the Torah. Consider Parashat Vayeshev. Joseph’s brothers envy him because he is Jacob’s favorite son. The brothers are extremely jealous and they sell Joseph, but Joseph ends up doing really well as we later find out in Parshat Miketz. The moral of these two Parshiot is that jealousy doesn't get you anywhere. SPOILER ALERT - not only does Joseph become Pharaoh ‘2nd in command’ but the brothers end up really needing Joseph’s help in order to survive.

The stories of the Parshiot are stories that we can relate to. I can easily make a connection between Parshat Vayeshev and my own life: Joseph’s brothers are jealous of him. Well, I get jealous of my siblings and I suspect that I am not the only one who has experienced sibling jealousy.

Storytelling is everywhere. When my family comes home from school or from work, there are always stories like

“guess who I saw” or “guess what happened today...”. This is storytelling in a different form. Being Jewish, we tell stories like nobody else. At least in my family, we use our hands, we have very loud voices, and over all we express ourselves very well while telling our family, friends and sometimes random people about our day. Without listening to, and telling stories, we would lose an important way of communicating. I know that texting, Snapchat and Instagram are great--trust me--but storytelling lets people know things about you on a much deeper level.

So how does this connect to being a Jew? Well, Jews have used storytelling to pass down important facts about our people and religion for generations - remember you can't text someone 300 years from now about what is happening in your life today. Would there even be a Purim if we didn't learn the Purim story through Megillat Esther?

If we did not have storytelling in Judaism where would we be? Let's please never find out.