

פ' מקץ וחנוכה תשפ"ג

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LEVELS OF BITOCHON

“It was at the end of two full years [shnosayim yomim]” (41:1); *Medrash Rabbo*: ‘Happy is the man that has made Hashem his trust’, this is Yosef, ‘and has not turned to the arrogant’, because he said to the butler “Remember me, and mention me”, two years were added [to his prison sentence]”.

Why does the *medrash* first praise Yosef and then criticize him?

The *Beis Halevi* explains that for an ordinary person there would have been nothing wrong in enlisting the help of the butler. In fact, it would have been required *hishtadlus*. However, for someone with an extremely high level of faith such as Yosef, even this minimal effort was excessive. It was precisely because Yosef made Hashem his trust that he was held to account for not living up to his exceptionally high standards, and he had to stay in prison for two more years.

In matters of *bitochon* everybody has their own *Shulchan Oruch*. The greater the level of one’s tangible *emuna* the less human effort has to be employed. Rav Sternbuch recalls witnessing several times how the Brisker Rov would weigh up whether a certain course of action constituted unnecessary *hishtadlus* that was not a par with his level of *bitochon*, and, in the end, he refrained from taking any action.

The Vilna Gaon also had a remarkably high level of faith and would not, for example, consult with doctors. However, once he went to visit a family member who was sick and rebuked him for not having called a doctor on the grounds that he was behaving like the Vilna Gaon himself. The Vilna Gaon said that if that family member had exerted minimal efforts in all areas of his life, such as making a living, then it would indeed have been praiseworthy to rely totally on Hashem and not call a doctor, but, otherwise, such behavior was mere laziness and nothing short of a sin.

DREAMS

“Paroh was dreaming” (*ibid*)

The dreams of an ordinary person always contain some nonsense, but the *medrash* says that the dreams of a king are a type of prophecy, so that every detail of a monarch’s dream needs to be explained. Similarly, an ordinary person’s dream does not contain something completely divorced from reality (see *Masseches Brochos* 55b), and only if a monarch dreams about thin ears of grain swallowing up full ears of grain, do those details have to be explained because his dreams relate to his entire nation.

They say in the name of the Chazon Ish that most people nowadays should not worry about their dreams, with the exception of dreams by *gedolei yisroel*, because they are quasi-prophecies which some exceptional individuals have the merit of experiencing. Kings - even non-Jewish ones - on the other hand, are sometimes shown events in the future through dreams, irrespective of the personal qualities of those kings.

PEACE OF MIND

“And Paroh sent and called Yosef, and they rushed him from the dungeon” (41:14)

Yosef had suffered terribly in prison with fetters on his legs, so why did they have to rush him out, would he not wish to get out of there as quickly as possible himself without being prompted to do so?

Yosef had such an elevated level of *bitochon* that he did not feel the need to accelerate the course of events through his own *hishtadlus*. He was convinced that whatever was due to happen, would not happen any more easily or quickly because of his own efforts.

Similarly, the Brisker Rov notes that it says in the *akeido* that Avrohom “got up in the morning”, as if it was like any other morning. That night he slept as well as he did any other night, with complete composure, and when he awoke he prepared himself to perform the *mitzvah* of the *akeido*, as if it were any other *mitzvah*, which did not demand such self-sacrifice. The *ovos hakedoshim* were in complete command of their emotions, and their levels of *emuna* and *bitochon* were unsurpassed.

MORE THAN GIVING DUE CREDIT

“What Hashem is about to do, He has told to Paroh” (41:25)

Throughout the *parshah*, we find Yosef mentioning Hashem’s Name repeatedly. This emphasis on his total subjugation to Hashem and his own lack of power, made a deep impression on Paroh and his servants, as they said, “Can another one like this be found, a man who has Hashem’s spirit in him?” (41:38).

The words “*b’ezras Hashem*” should be constantly on our lips, both in order to internalize the message of our dependence on Hashem for ourselves, and in order to create a *kiddush Hashem*, as Yosef did. In truth, it is brought down in the name of the Kelmer Maggid that “*b’ezras Hashem*” implies that we are the active agents, and Hashem is merely assisting us, *chas vesholom*. Therefore, suggests the Maggid, the phrase “*birtzos Hashem*” (if Hashem wills it) is actually more appropriate, since it indicates that everything is dependent on Hashem’s Will, and we are merely performing His will. Although the *minhag* is not to be particular about use of this phrase, the point he makes is very pertinent.

UTILIZING THE YEARS OF PLENTY

Now Paroh should seek a man of understanding and wisdom. (41:33)

Rav Shlomo Bloch asks why a man of exceptional wisdom and understanding was required for the purpose of gathering food during the good years. One would think that such a task calls for an organized, energetic, and industrious person, not specifically an intelligent one.

He explains that during the years of plenty, people do not appreciate the need for storing food for the years of lack. One needs more than just a *macher* (activist) to encourage the population to develop a feeling of hunger during a period of abundance. Only someone with outstanding foresight can fulfill such a task.

Similarly, as long as we are alive in this world, we enjoy years of plenty in terms of our possibility to perform *mitzvos*, as opposed to our situation in the World to Come, in which we will experience “years of lack” because we will no longer have the opportunity to perform *mitzvos* and good deeds. Our task is to acquire the characteristics of a wise and understanding person, who has the foresight to develop psychological strategies for living with the constant awareness of the need to utilize his time in this world to the utmost. In this way we will not disdain or postpone any opportunity to learn Torah or perform a *mitzvah*.

LEADERSHIP QUALITIES

“And they called out before him, “[This is] the king's patron (avrech)” appointing him over the entire land of Egypt” (41:43) Rashi: R. Yehuda expounded: *avrech* refers to Yosef, who was a father (*av*) in wisdom, and tender (*rach*) in years. R. Yossi ben Durmaskit said to him... *avrech* is only a term denoting knees (*birkayim*), for all would enter and exit under his hand”

Rabi Yehudah is of the opinion that if a leader is seen to be wise, that is sufficient even if he is young, because he will be respected just for his wisdom. Rabi Yossi ben Durmaskit, on the other hand, says that wisdom, on its own, is not sufficient for leadership purposes, and only if a leader is also strong-minded and sticks to his principles will he be respected and obeyed.

Yosef was great in wisdom, but he also stubbornly refused to diverge from his religious principles by even one iota, and led the nation on the basis of his plan, without vacillating. Such are the qualities of a genuine leader.

A *talmid chochom* too must not be swayed by public opinion. He must fearlessly maintain strict halachic standards always. When choosing a *rov* or leader, it is of course preferable to look for a *talmid chochom* of stature, but he must also possess the ability to command respect from his congregants. This is an indispensable requirement for any true Jewish leader, because only people with a forceful character are capable of ignoring public opinion. Such people will enjoy success and *siyatta dishmayo*.

FEELINGS OF SUPERIORITY

“And Paroh said to Yoseph, ‘I am Paroh, and besides you, no one may lift his hand or his foot in the entire land of Egypt’ (41:44).

Rav Yechezkel Levenstein wonders how Yosef had agreed to accept the position of managing the mighty Egyptian kingdom without any previous experience. He had been a Yeshiva *bochur* until the age of 17, and had subsequently been a slave of Potiphar, and sat in prison for 12 years. How did he now have the courage to accept such a responsible position?

He answered that Yosef lived with a clear awareness of his own spiritual greatness and the moral inferiority of his Egyptian subjects. Although he was careful not to cause them any sorrow, this awareness did give him the courage to rule over Egypt.

AWAKENING DIVINE MERCY

“We are guilty for our brother, that we witnessed the distress of his soul when he begged us, and we did not listen. That is why this trouble has come upon us... They did not know that Yosef understood, for the interpreter was between them. ” (42:21, 23)

Previously when the brothers had declared, **“We are honest.** Your servants were never spies” (42:11), Yosef had acted towards them with the full force of judgement, telling them “No! But you have come to see the nakedness of the land” (42:12), but now that they had confessed their guilt (**“We are guilty for our brother”**), Yosef pitied them and started to cry.

Similarly, when a person stubbornly insists that he is in the right, and has done nothing wrong, Hashem acts towards him with the trait of judgement, but if he confesses his sins and arouses himself to repent, he thereby awakens an abundance of divine mercy which overturns divine decrees, as it says “He who covers his transgressions shall not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them shall obtain mercy” (*Mishlei* 28:13).

Rabbenu Nissim in his *viduy* notes that Hashem’s conduct in this respect is the opposite of a human judge. When someone sues his friend in a court in this world, if the defendant denies the claim, he may be saved from liability to pay, whereas if he confesses, he is obligated to pay.

FORGETTING WITH JOY

Yosef named the firstborn Menashe, for G-d has made me forget all my trouble and all that was in my father’s house. (41:51)

Why did Yosef not only praise Hashem for making him forget his father’s house, but commemorate this fact in his son’s name? We would expect that his father’s house would be constantly on his mind.

Rav Yisrael Salanter explains that Yosef wanted to express his gratitude to Hashem that he had managed to eradicate any feelings of hatred or revenge for what his brothers had done to him, and the anguish they had inflicted on him and his father. He was completely convinced that even if they had had bad intentions, they were only messengers of Hashem, and everything had turned out for the good (see *Bereishis* 45:8 and 50:20).

Yosef serves as an inspiration to anyone suffering from painful experiences — past or present. His strength encourages us to refuse to succumb to feelings of despondency or despair; and rise above them with determination, and eventually joy.

CHANUKA

Unlike the *mizbeach* and the sacrifices, the purpose of the menorah in the *Beis Hamikdosh* was not to achieve atonement, but rather to ignite the light of Torah, and nowadays we light the menorah on Chanuka in each generation to symbolize our obligation to spread Torah and delve its depths.

In order to merit the light of Torah, it has to be studied with the realization that one is cleaving to divine wisdom. If one studies it like any other wisdom, he will become burnt by its fire, and it will become an elixir of death for him. Rav Zelig Reuven Bengis told Rav Sternbuch that when he went to see Rav Dovid Friedman of Karlin he noticed that he had a board in front of him containing the words *shivisi Hashem lenegdi somid* (“I have set Hashem before me always”) in large letters, and Rav Dovid explained that he did not want to get carried away with the intellectual beauty of Torah and forget even for a moment He Who gave us the Torah, and that our purpose in studying it must be to understand His Will.

We say in *al hanisim* that the Greeks wanted to make us forget *Your* Torah and to force us to transgress the statutes [*chukim*] of Your Will. They had no issue with the rational parts of the Torah, in fact they admired them, but they could not countenance our observing *chukim*, which they did not understand, nor could they accept that the Torah was of divine origin.

We light the menorah outside our houses in order to negate the philosophy which advocates being a Jew in our home and a good person outside, and in order to emphasize that we are not embarrassed of our Torah and *yiddishkeit*.

Rav Sternbuch recalls how Rav Moshe Schneider would endeavor to convey to his students that *bnei Torah* have to be aware of their elevated status, and that the existence of the celestial spheres as well as of this world is dependent on them. He said that for his generation it was imperative for *yeshivah bachurim* to appreciate the great privilege and responsibility associated with being *bnei Torah*. This applies no less today.

The other central message of Chanuka is the fundamental item of faith that there is no such thing as nature, since the whole of creation is constantly being re-created and dependent on Hashem’s Will; nor is there such a thing as a “law of nature”. As the Ramban notes, anyone who does not believe this is an *epikores* [heretic].

This is one explanation as to why we light a candle on the first night of Chanuka, even though the miracle only started on the second day, because there was enough oil for one day. The first day was no less a miracle than the subsequent ones, albeit a “hidden” one, to use the Ramban’s terminology.

Just like Tisha Be'av is a day of mourning for all the calamitous events which we have endured during our tortured history in *golus*, so too on Chanuka we give thanks Hashem for the miracles performed in each and every generation on the national and on the personal level, be they through open or hidden miracles.

The *gemoro* (*Rosh Hashono* 18b) notes that Chanuka was not canceled following the destruction of the *Beis Hamikdosh* because it “publicizes the miracle”, and Rashi (*ibid*) notes that the *mitzvah* of Chanuka is considered as important as a *mitzvah* originating from the Torah. This is because the message of Chanuka contains fundamental messages for the whole of *yiddishkeit*.