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PHARAOH'S WISDOM

"Pharaoh gave Joseph the name Tzaphnas-Paneach; and he gave him for a wife Asenath daughter of Potiphera, priest of On" (Gen. 41:45)

Pharaoh foresaw political problems in appointing one accused of rape by Potiphar's wife. Pharaoh wisely dispelled rumors of Joseph's ill repute by giving him Potiphar's daughter as a wife. Who would believe that Joseph attempted rape of a woman, and then marries her daughter? Poti-Phera's wife would no longer accuse Joseph, as any accusation would bring shame to herself.

Pharaoh sought to silence Poti-Phera too, by promoting him to a Priest, in exchange for his silence. Finally, Pharaoh changing Joseph's name was an attempt to cloak Joseph's Hebrew slave reputation with an Egyptian veneer.

God joined these acts in one passage as they all share one goal of Pharaoh dispelling Joseph's harmful reputation.

LETTERS

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Being Jewish without God?

QUESTION: Must one believe in God to be considered Jewish?

RABBI: This is akin to asking, "Must one help people in order to be called kind?" Kindness is synonymous with helping others. If one never helped another person, he is not kind. So too, the definition of a Jew is one who is convinced that God exists, that He is the sole creator, that He rewards and punishes, that He is not physical, and that there are no intelligent beings that can counter God's will (idolatry is false).

So, the answer is this: "Yes, one must believe in God to be Jewish."

The most vital element of Judaism is recognizing a single Creator of the universe. Without this recognition and conviction, one is not Jewish and has no portion in the afterlife—Olam Haba—as afterlife is the direct result of a perfected soul. And a perfected soul is one who distinguishes reality from fantasy, and adheres to the authority of Torah's Author. One who is not perfect—and worse, fails to recognize God—has no

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means through which he can enjoy the afterlife, which is a state of the soul rejoicing in greater knowledge of God. Without knowledge of God to begin with, one cannot rejoice in “greater” knowledge of God when the veil (the senses) separating the soul from knowledge is removed.

Additionally, the atheist and the agnostic possess no knowledge; their lives are meaningless. In their capacity as humans, they have failed, for they abandoned the use of their unique faculty: the intellect in pursuit of God. As all that exists is due to God’s will, and as the atheist and the agnostic deny this, their understanding of the universe is false. They do not believe that the wisdom which permeates every corner of the universe is intentionally presented to man for him to discover ever-increasing knowledge about God and His plan for mankind. They pass through their lives with the fallacy that there is no plan for mankind. While the agnostic and atheist view mountains and streams as mere accidental formations, the Torah Jew understands this topography as a means of channeling waters to societies distant from water sources; an expression of God’s wisdom and benevolence. Elevated terrain also offer a distant views, a defense from enemies as man sees them with greater time to prepare militarily. And mountainous regions offer greater square acreage than flatlands for crops. But to atheists and agnostics, this is not a plan of an Intelligent Designer.

The agnostic and atheist cannot explain why man alone possesses an intellect. But the Torah Jew understands that God’s plan of the human intellect is for man to live his life immersed in study and analysis of nature and Torah, witnessing God’s brilliance. The Torah Jew—or any human who follows Bible, God’s plan for mankind—finds the greatest enjoyment in this pursuit. But the atheist and the agnostic do not give greater purpose to man over animals; the intellect is something that they cannot say is “intended” for man. Therefore, they are without any guidance to determine how to live the most enjoyable existence. At best, they will construct some practical laws to protect property and physical harm so that they might be undisturbed in pursuit of either wealth or lusts. Practical issues such as “Do we kill man to save an animal, or kill an animal to save a man?” place the atheist and the agnostic in quandaries which lead to foolishness and their earlier demise.

Without a recognition that all that exists follows a brilliant plan, they will not look for that plan. They will also reject Torah. Thereby they lose out on the primary purpose of their lives which is to enjoy God’s wisdom and His plan for mankind. Some might become mathematicians or scientists but their theorems come to a brick wall when faced with the question of what the greater purpose is for these sciences; are they mere functional tools to grasp and manipulate matter? If so, what greater purpose is thereby served? Einstein was unique in this respect as he saw a “mind” guiding the universe. Abraham too came to the same conclusion and abandoned idolatry. These intellects followed the soul’s path of thought which seeks to understand. But understanding is abruptly halted when one removes a Will in the universe. One comes to a frustrating dead end, as he cannot answer why Earth and man exist.

Without knowledge of God, one truly knows nothing and cannot possibly have an afterlife. He is outside the pale of the Jewish nation. ■

What is Most Sacred in Judaism?

QUESTION: What is the most sacred thing in Judaism?

RABBI: We must always first define our terms. “Sacred” in Judaism refers to what is most important in man’s relationship with God. Therefore, God is the most sacred thing, or that which is most holy. Angels refer to God as holy:

And one would call to the other, “Holy, holy, holy, the Lord of Hosts, His presence fills all the earth!” (Isaiah 6:3)

Targum Yonasan (Ibid.) explains:

And one cried unto another, and they were saying, Holy in the highest and exalted heavens is the house of His dwelling, holy upon the earth is the work of His might, holy forever without end, is the Lord of hosts, the whole earth is full of the brightness of His glory.

Isaiah teaches that God is distinct (holy) in the metaphysical world: He is unlike angels. He is distinct on Earth where He displays His might, but he is incomparable to anything earthly. And He is this way (holy) eternally, as God does not change. Thus, in both areas of creation—the metaphysical heavens, and on Earth—God is distinct and unknowable, and He is so eternally.

The entire focus of Judaism is God. This is because Judaism is all about grasping reality and appreciating the brilliance in all we see in the universe and learn in Torah. And since God is the author of both, He is the most sacred part of Judaism.

Our Shmoneh Essay prayers’ first section also concludes with “God is Holy.” This means that God is unknowable. He is distinct from human knowledge; our minds can’t grasp His nature, as God told Moses, “For man cannot know me while alive” (Exod. 33:20). This prayer culminates with God’s unknowable nature, to remove man from viewing God wrongly, in utilitarian terms, generated by God’s assistance of the Patriarchs. While it is true that God helps man, that is not His definition. We must claim complete ignorance of God’s nature, so we conclude with “You are holy.”

If one has no concept of God, nothing else can be sacred. God is the substratum of all that is holy. Without Bible’s determination of what is sacred, all men will argue their subjective views of what is sacred, relying only on their imagination and emotions. This conflict will destroy societies and families. But with the objective definition that God is most sacred (the only authority), and that we define God as the sole Creator, the one who gave mankind His Bible and no other religion, all disputes are put to rest. There is societal harmony. There is peace. And this forms a backdrop for man’s study of God’s will. Prophets state that one day, all nations will recognize Bible as God’s only religion. There will be global harmony. What an amazing time that will be.

Without knowledge of God, one truly knows nothing. So in man’s pursuit of knowledge, he must recognize God, otherwise all his knowledge is false. God is therefore the most sacred part of Judaism. ■



PHAROAH'S DREAMS

Psychology

Rabbi Israel Chait

Written by a student

"A new king arose in Egypt that did not know Joseph."
(Exod. 1:8)

Rav says he was literally a new king. Shmuel says he was not a new king but rather, the same Pharaoh, who acted as though he did not know Joseph and made new decrees against the Jews. The position of Shmuel seems difficult. A simple reading of the text would indicate he was merely a new king. Why did Shmuel feel compelled to understand the meaning of the verse in such a strained interpretation? It is obvious that Shmuel detected something in Pharaoh's personality that indicates that he pretended as though he did not know Joseph.

In order to properly analyze the personality of Pharaoh and his relationship with Joseph, we must examine Pharaoh's dream and how Joseph's interpretation led to his ascendance to power. Pharaoh's dreams can help us examine his personality. There are two causes of dreams: 1) divine/prophesy, 2) a person's wishes or the thoughts of his unconscious. Pharaoh had two dreams. By analyzing and contrasting both dreams we should be able to determine the portion of the dream which is prophetic, and the part which is an expression of his personality. The aspects of his dreams which are duplicated are obviously of divine origin. However, if we examine the portions of one dream, which are not common to the other, said portion is not prophetic. It would understandably be an expression of Pharaoh's unconscious.

By analyzing the dreams we note one striking difference with respect to the dreams concerning the cows. Pharaoh sees himself as part of that dream. Genesis 41:1 states, "and behold I was standing above the river." Another unique aspect of this

dream is that it states the origin of the cows. The cows were coming up out of the river. However, the dream of the bundles of wheat does not state their origin. We must understand; why does Pharaoh include himself in the first dream, and why does he envision the cows appearing from out of the river?

Another clue to Pharaoh's personality would be an analysis of his actions. Upon Joseph's interpretation of the dreams, Pharaoh's response seems overwhelming. He immediately appoints a despicable "Jewish lad, a slave" as his viceroy, the second most powerful position in Egypt. He dresses Joseph in ornate clothing and extends him a regal coronation. Furthermore, when his subjects come to ask his advice when they were starving, he replies "go to Joseph and whatever he tells you to do, abide by it." It would seem rather unlikely that Pharaoh was willing to relinquish all control and credit, and suddenly bestow it upon Joseph. His response, besides being overwhelming, seems incongruous to Shmuel's interpretation of his later actions. At this juncture he seems to be a righteous individual capable of appreciating and recognizing the good of Joseph. However, later, after Joseph's death, there is a complete transformation of his personality and he denies Joseph's existence and in fact, acts ruthlessly to his people, the Jews.

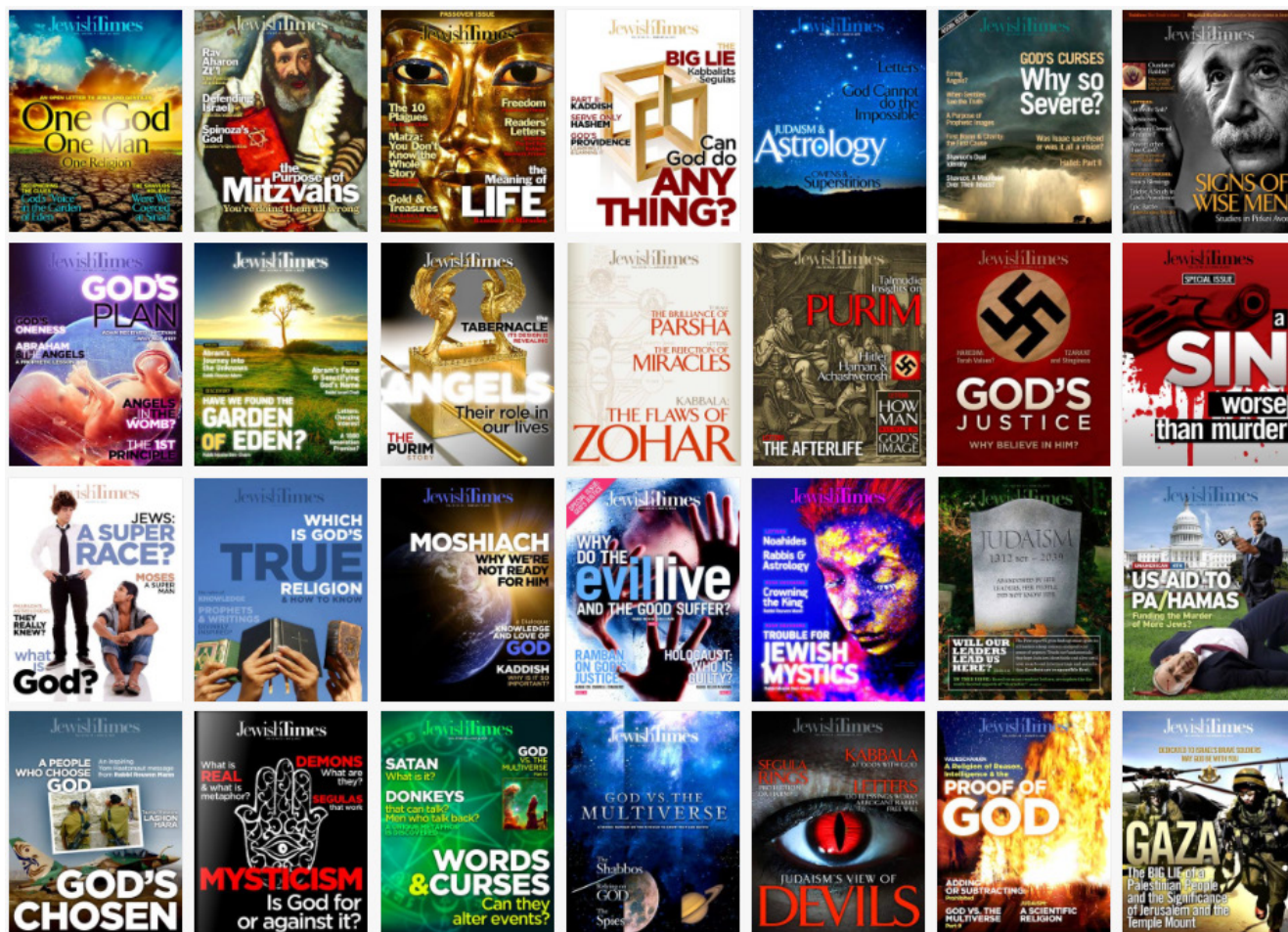
An understanding of the extraneous portion of his dreams can give us an insight into his personality and can demonstrate why seemingly incompatible actions are actually consistent with his character.

In his first dream the cows arose from the river. The Hebrew term for river that the Torah uses is "ye-or." Rashi explains that this term is used because it is referring to the Nile. The Nile was the source of sustenance for the land of Egypt. Egypt is a dry climate and the Nile overflows and irrigates Egypt. The Nile represents the source for the fulfillment of the Egyptians' basic needs. However, in

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Pharaoh's dream he was standing "al ha ye-or," above the Nile. This signifies that Pharaoh felt that he was "above" the Nile. In his own mind he was more powerful than the powers of nature. Pharaoh considered himself a god. In fact, the Medrash tells us, that he even emptied his bowels without anyone knowing, so as to feign divinity in front of his people, never needing to relieve himself. He professed to be above the laws of nature. Thus, the most threatening occurrence to Pharaoh would be if he were not in total control. It would shatter his self image as a god. Thus, the occurrence of a drought was a fearful event to Pharaoh. The Torah tells us "vatepaem rucho," his spirit was troubled. Unconsciously, he feared losing control. That is why in the dream he envisioned the cows coming out of the river. He feared a natural event that would be beyond his control. He thus sensed that Joseph's interpretation was accurate. He therefore had to come to grips with the possibility of losing control. However, Joseph presented him with the ability to maintain control. He realized that through Joseph he would be able to retain control and keep intact his image as a god. However, in order for him to view his reliance on Joseph as a situation akin to being in control, he was coerced into viewing Joseph as an extension of himself. Psychologically there was total identification with Joseph. Therefore, his response to Joseph was overwhelming. The deification of Joseph was not an abnormal response, but on the contrary it was necessitated by his identification with Joseph. It was an expression of his vision of Joseph as his alter ego. This relationship reinstated his self-image as the most powerful force in the world: with Joseph, he now resumed his self-image as a god. Therefore, when people asked him what to do, he quite naturally responded, "whatever Joseph says, do." It bolstered his image of being in control. Joseph's actions were merely expressions of his own power. Pharaoh and Joseph together, in his mind, were one entity.

We can now understand Shmuel's explanation. After Joseph's death, Pharaoh, because of his psychological make-up, faced a terrible problem. Narcissism, the love of oneself, was a key characteristic of Pharaoh's personality. A narcissistic individual's psychic

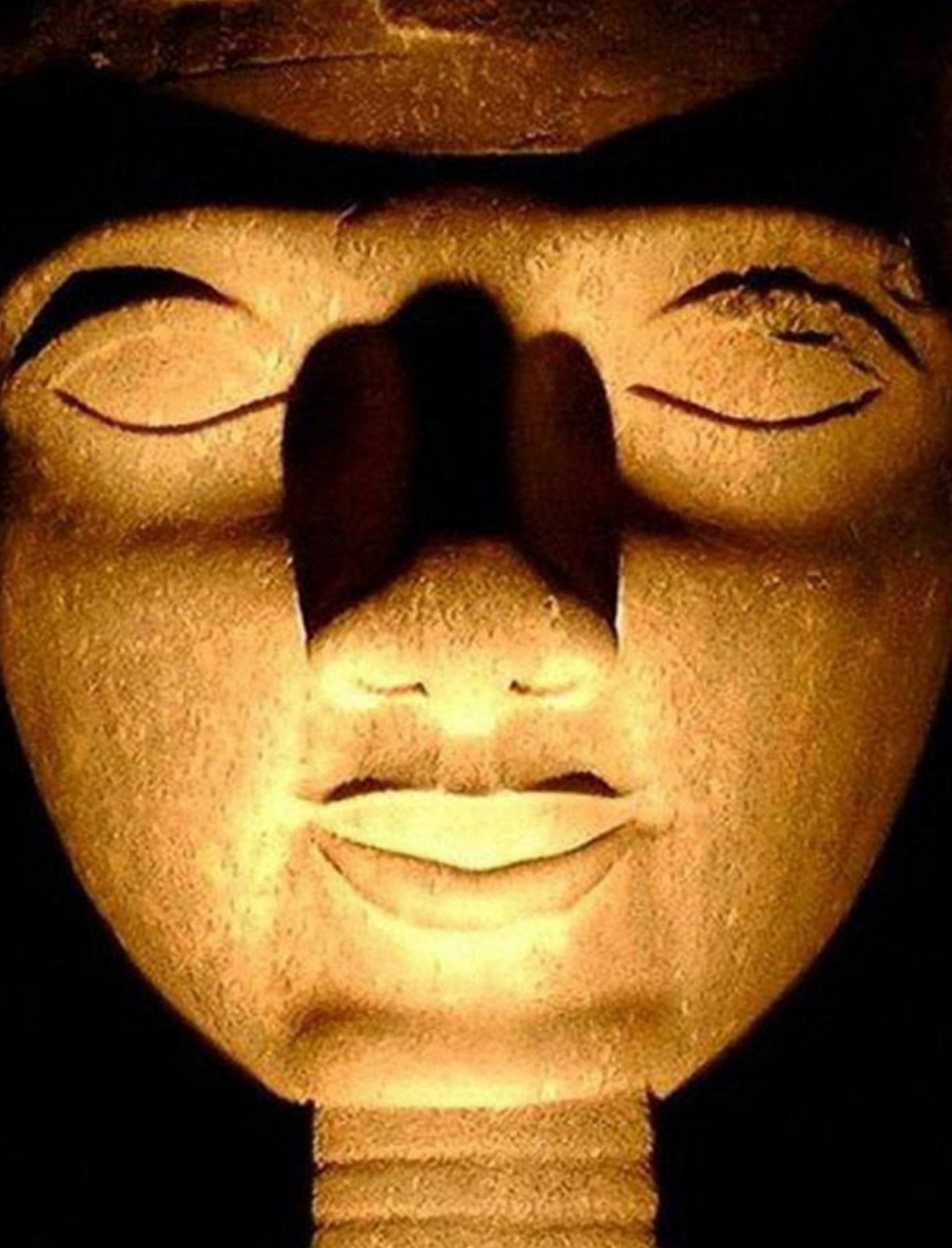
energies are directed towards the love of the self. However, when a person like Pharaoh, strongly identifies with another individual and views him as his alter-ego, that other person becomes a source of his narcissistic, psychic energy. Therefore, upon Joseph's death, the excess psychic energy could no longer be channeled towards his alter ego. He began to confront the same emotions that he previously experienced. He felt threatened by the fact that he was really not in control. However, he could not use the defense mechanism of identification but instead resorted to denial. He was unable to confront the fact that Joseph really allowed him to retain control. Therefore, psychologically, in order to function without feeling threatened, he had to act as though he did not know Joseph. Any remembrance of Joseph or acknowledging Joseph's value was painful to his self-image of being all-powerful. Accordingly, not only did he have to act as though he did not know Joseph, but that denial coerced him to act in the opposite fashion. His remembrance of Joseph was so painful; it served as the source for his oppression towards Joseph's people, the children of Israel.

Therefore Shmuel stated, "a new king" is only viewed as new, in terms of his actions. However an analysis of Pharaoh's personality indicates that on the contrary, it was the same Pharaoh. That is why the Torah specifically articulates that the new king did not know Joseph. If he were truly a new king, the statement would be redundant. The Torah is really offering us an insight into his nature.

An example of this type of psychological mechanism is evident in Christianity. The Christian hates the Jew for ostensibly killing his god. However, this is indicative of a psychological defense mechanism. The Christian cannot admit that we gave them their god, since Jesus was Jewish.

Jacob, upon meeting Pharaoh, was keenly aware of Pharaoh's true nature. His response to Pharaoh's inquiry with respect to his age seems rather lengthy and irrelevant. Genesis 49:9 says, "And Jacob said to Pharaoh, the days of the years of my sojourning are 130, few and bad were the years of my life and I have not reached the days of the years of the lives of my fathers, in the days of their sojourns." Nachmanides questions this rather lengthy response. However, based upon our insight into Pharaoh's personality, it is understandable. A person, who perceives himself as all-powerful and god-like, feels threatened by someone who possesses something that is desirable, which he does not have. Jacob realized that Pharaoh had such a personality. He sensed that Pharaoh, when questioning his age, noted he was an elder and was asking more out of a sense of envy rather than curiosity. He sensed that he possessed something that Pharaoh desired: old age. Accordingly, Jacob who was old, at a time when people were not living so long, responded based upon this perception. He stated that he was not so old, and that he did not have a good life nor had lived as long as his fathers. He attempted to dispel any envy that Pharaoh may have had. He did not want to entice Pharaoh's anger by giving him any cause for jealousy. Therefore, his lengthy response was appropriate and warranted, considering the circumstances.

It also explains the blessing that Jacob bestowed upon Pharaoh. Rashi tells us that he blessed him that the Nile should rise to greet him whenever he approaches it. Jacob was aware of Pharaoh's personality. This blessing Pharaoh truly cherished. It represented that even the most powerful phenomenon of nature would be subordinate to his control. ■



How did Joseph know that Pharaoh's dreams were prophetic; maybe they were natural nightmares? Reviewing Joseph's first words to Pharaoh, it is amazing, and interesting. It shows you a truly important idea about life, that, perhaps, you would not otherwise know:

And Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I had a dream, but no one can interpret it. Now I have heard it said of you that you hear a dream to interpret it." Joseph answered Pharaoh, saying, "It is not I; God will answer Pharaoh's peace" (Gen. 41:15,16).

Pharaoh praised Joseph and built him up. Joseph responded, ascribing all his wisdom to God. It sounds like a false humility. Rashi comments:

The wisdom to interpret dreams is not my own, but God will answer—He will put in my mouth an answer that will give Pharaoh peace.

On the surface, Joseph appears to be saying the dream is a good one. But how does he know; he had not yet heard the dream? Furthermore, according to Rashi, is it not the height of arrogance to claim knowledge of God's plans? Pharaoh then retells Joseph his 2 dreams: 7 healthy cows eaten by 7 emaciated cows, and 7 healthy ears of grain swallowed by 7 withered ears.

And Joseph said to Pharaoh, "Pharaoh's dreams are one; God has told Pharaoh what He is about to do. The 7 healthy cows are 7 years, and the 7 healthy ears are 7 years; it is the same dream" (Ibid. 41:25,26).

Later, Joseph tells Pharaoh:

And as for Pharaoh having had the same dream twice, it means that the matter is imminent from God, and that God will soon carry it out (Ibid. 41:32).

Thus, Joseph first explains the dreams' repetition with this verse. Meaning, when earlier he told Pharaoh that the "dreams were one," he was not yet explaining the duplication, but a different concept. What was that concept?

Joseph did not know that the dreams were prophetic; he hadn't heard them yet. When Joseph said, "God will answer Pharaoh's

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PARSHA

Joseph's Response: Pharaoh's Dreams

DREAM INTERPRETATION & PSYCHOLOGY

RABBI ISRAEL CHAIT

peace,” he was not referring to the interpretation; he was referring to Pharaoh’s state of mind. Pharaoh was suffering; conflict is the worst state of mind. Pharaoh was disturbed for he could not understand the dreams’ meaning. An ordinary dream will express one’s conflict; one can be disturbed regarding an inner conflict of which he is ignorant. Or he can be disturbed because the dream is prophetic and he senses that it is bad, but he doesn’t understand it. Either one of these possibilities would disturb Pharaoh. When Rashi says, “God will answer: He will put in my mouth an answer that will be for Pharaoh’s welfare,” he is not referring to the future. Joseph doesn’t know the dreams were prophetic; he hadn’t heard the dream yet. Joseph meant that either way, “I am going to alleviate your disturbed state of mind.” If it’s a natural dream, the disturbance is an unconscious conflict, and Joseph will help to reveal that conflict, and Pharaoh will achieve peace. And if the dream is prophetic and the outcome is hidden from Pharaoh, once Joseph would explain it to Pharaoh, it won’t disturb Pharaoh any more, even if it forecasts something bad. Joseph said that either way, he could help remove Pharaoh’s suffering. Ignorance traps one’s mind; it makes one obsess over a matter. Joseph told Pharaoh he could help remove that ignorance. Understanding the dream alleviates one’s mind.

The immediate suffering Pharaoh endured was greater than a bad outcome. The latter is just reality, but the worst thing is the inner struggle. More important than discovering the dream’s interpretation, is psychological harmony. Joseph said he will help alleviate this turmoil: “I will make you whole, I will make you at peace with yourself.” This is what Joseph meant. The dream could be bad or good; either way, he would alleviate Pharaoh’s distraught state [by removing his ignorance]. Joseph was not referring to assisting Pharaoh in the future reality [the dreams’ meaning]. He was referring to the fact that once the future reality ceases to be hidden from Pharaoh, the suffering will cease. But a prophetic dream disturbs a person, unlike a psychological conflict; it operates in its own orbit. That is, that the bad subject matter is hidden. In prophetic dreams, the event is hidden. But yet, man experiences the affect of the event. This affect—without a realistic cause—disturbs man. He has a disturbing affect, but he does not know why. He keeps trying to reach out to discover the cause. But once the cause is revealed, that pain is gone.

Let us answer Rashi, which always bothered me: “The wisdom to interpret dreams is not my own, but God will answer—He will put in my mouth an answer that will be for Pharaoh’s welfare.” This sounds like false humility. Wouldn’t that make Joseph arrogant, claiming that God



puts into his mouth an answer? Even if God had done so before, how can he know that God will do it again? And if Joseph means God always does this for him, is this not the height of arrogance? How does Joseph know for sure that God—from the heavens—will implant His answer in Joseph’s mind? Maybe He won’t.

However, the explanation is that this was a prayer, not foreknowledge, for no man knows God’s thoughts. Joseph said to Pharaoh in other words, “It is my prayer that God puts words in my mouth.” As the Rav said on the words, “And God should give dread; V’chane tane pachdicha” (High Holiday prayers), it is a prayer that God “should” give man proper dread of God’s kingship. Joseph said, “I have no special powers, and I can’t guarantee an answer.” Joseph prayed that God “should” give him an answer so Pharaoh would be at peace, not that God “will” do this.

Now we have the question which we started with: How did Joseph know that Pharaoh’s dreams were in fact prophetic? Dreams are wish fulfillment. Even in a bad dream—a nightmare—there exists some positive element. It may not be the essence of the dream, which might be very bad, but there exists some good. However, Joseph said, “Pharaoh’s dreams are one.” Now, if with “Pharaoh’s dreams are one” Joseph meant to address the dreams’ repetition, Joseph’s words later would be redundant: “And as for Pharaoh having had the same dream twice, it means that the matter is imminent by God, and that God will soon carry it out” (Ibid. 41:32). This would be redundant. But the language in 41:32 indicates that Joseph did not yet discuss the repetition of the dreams. In truth, in 41:32, Joseph addresses the repetition for the first time. Thus, “Pharaoh’s dreams are one” stated earlier cannot address the imminent nature of the forecast. It does not mean that there are both good and bad cows, one good element and one bad. “It’s one dream” means this: There are no good cows; there is no value in the good cows. Meaning, the subsequent emaciated cows completely obscured the healthy cows; there was no good in the healthy cows as they will inevitably be swallowed by the famine. The goodness of the healthy cows serves no good element, Pharaoh gains no benefit at all. [We can paraphrase the dream as] “One dream of bad cows completely removing the good of the healthy cows.” The dream is not “good cows” separate from “bad cows.” Both cows are tied together; the good cows are destined to be swallowed by the bad cows. Sum total, there is no good in these dreams. [The years of plenty were obscured, as if they never were].

Thus, there was no good element in Pharaoh’s

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dreams. Thereby Joseph understood these dreams were prophetic, for they contained no positive element [natural dreams are partially wish fulfillment—a positive element—but Pharaoh's dreams contained no such good; no such wish. Thus, the dreams must be prophetic]. Telling Pharaoh his dreams were one, Joseph was not explaining the duplication, but he was saying that as a whole, the dreams contained no positive element. This was not a simple nightmare with deeply rooted conflicts. As there is nothing good in these dreams, they must be prophetic.

Another important point is that primitive man is fatalistic about dreams. He feels that a dream forecasts inevitable doom. Joseph taught Pharaoh a different philosophy: man can act with intellect to avoid a forecast. [And that's exactly what Joseph did.] Pharaoh always thought that an interpretation is final. Joseph taught Pharaoh that although the interpretation is horrible, "You are not bound by it." Free will can override the interpretation [it can manipulate real future factors, and avoid catastrophe. The forecast was true, but depending on man's response, he can either sit back and tolerate the doom—a primitive attitude—or he can devise a strategy to alter the outcome].

Pharaoh responded to Joseph's suggestion to appoint a grain keeper: "Can we find another like him, a man in whom is the spirit of God?" (Gen. 41:38). Pharaoh expressed surprise at this new method: matters are not fatalistic; man has free will. A dream is just a revelation; God is informing man what will happen [without man's intervention], but it does not have to result this way [it does not have to go unaltered]. All depends on man's free will. Pharaoh meant to say, "We never viewed life this way; we always viewed life and dreams as fatalistic."

Pharaoh called Joseph a "man"; one not frightened by superstition. Nevertheless, Joseph is not an atheist; "God's spirit is in him." An atheist, you can say, is a man." Putin said, "I can do as I will; there is no divine retribution." OK, that's his view. He is a "man." But he has no "spirit of God." But Pharaoh said of Joseph that he is a free thinker; he has free will, he does not fear acting, but he also has knowledge of God through his spirit of God. "Can we find another like him, a man in whom is the spirit of God?" Pharaoh was surprised; usually you find a heretic who is a powerful man, or you find a man with the spirit of God in him, but he cannot act. But Joseph possessed both qualities. ■

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DIVINE DREAMS

2 Amazing Lessons

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim

When studying Joseph's dreams and interpretations, the analogy of a genius painter comes to mind. This painter would arrange millions of paint specks on a single paintbrush. Then, using only one stroke, he would move his brush across a blank canvas. Suddenly, a beautiful scene would emerge; trees with colorful leaves, birds in flight, sun and clouds, mountains, and streams. A passerby witnessing the picture-perfect scene emerge with one stroke, would be in awe of how, with one action, this painter anticipated how all the paint specks would fall into place and create a perfectly harmonious and picturesque scene. God's two dreams granted to the young Joseph paint such a picture.

When he was 17, Joseph dreamt of 11 sheaves bowing to his. And then in another dream, he saw 11 stars and the sun and moon bowing to him. Even after seeing his brothers' dismay at his retelling the first dream, Joseph nonetheless felt compelled to repeat his second dream to his brothers, and to his father in a second recounting. It was due to these dreams that the brothers conspired to kill Joseph...eventually selling him instead. It was his father who rejected an interpretation that they would all bow to Joseph: the 11 stars being his 11 brothers, and the sun and moon representing Joseph's parental figures (his mother already died, discrediting the dream's accuracy). At this stage, it does not appear that Joseph offered his own interpretation. Yet, 13 years later, Joseph accurately and astonishingly interprets not only the dreams of Pharaoh's stewards, but also Pharaoh's dreams. All 3 dreams came true exactly! But how did Joseph know their interpretations? This question is strengthened by Joseph's apparent lack of interpretative skills concerning his own two dreams. And many of the Torah commentaries including Ramban and Klay Yakkar do not suggest Joseph was divinely inspired with the interpretations; he interpreted each dream solely through his own wisdom.

Later on, when his brothers descended to Egypt to purchase food during the famine, the brothers did not recognize the now 39-year-old, bearded Joseph standing before them. It is suggested that a further denial of this Egyptian viceroy truly being Joseph, was generated from the brothers' rejection of any success Joseph would attain. Having been humiliated by his brothers, they were sure Joseph would be psychologically crippled, and certainly no viceroy.

When Joseph sees his brothers, he "recalls the dreams." Rabbi Israel Chait said that this means that Joseph recognized the divine license provided by his dreams to subjugate his brothers into repentance. Creating a situation where the youngest Benjamin would be imprisoned on false charges, Joseph orchestrated a replica of his very own sale to force his brothers into a parallel dilemma. Would

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they abandon the accused Benjamin now, who ostensibly stole Joseph's goblet, as they had abandoned Joseph 20 years earlier when they sold Joseph? Or, would they display complete repentance, and sacrifice themselves for their brother? Normally, one is not permitted to place anyone under such a trial, but Joseph recognized his dreams as divine in origin: a license to perfect his brothers. As Rabbi Chait taught, the first dream of the brothers' sheaves bowing to him—physical dominance—was the precursor for Joseph's dominance over them in the spiritual realm, symbolized by the 11 stars, sun and moon bowing to him. The first dream was meant by God to teach Joseph that when the brothers would bow to him for food, Joseph thereby received permission to rule over them concerning their perfection, symbolized by higher bodies: the luminaries.

Subsequent to his dreams, Joseph understood their meaning; and not necessarily 39 years later when he first saw his brothers...but perhaps much earlier. Torah only tells us that he recalled the dreams upon seeing his brothers, to teach that this was when he would act upon those dreams. But their interpretation may have preceded this by many years.

When did Joseph become such a great dream interpreter? In Egypt, he was imprisoned for 11 years and he didn't seem to offer interpretation to his own dreams at 17 years of age. From where did Joseph obtain such knowledge of dreams, that he would eventually interpret the dreams of Pharaoh's stewards and Pharaoh himself, with such precision? We are aware of the Torah's description of Joseph as "Ben Zekunim" or as Unkelos translates, "a wise son." Jacob

taught Joseph all his knowledge attained at the Yeshiva of Shem and Aver. Perhaps this included lessons Jacob learned from his own dream of the ladder, and maybe others. So at the very outset, Joseph was a wise individual.

We also wonder why God gave these two dreams to Joseph, as they apparently contributed—if not caused—Joseph's sale. But we cannot approach God's true intent without His saying so. However, we can study, and perhaps suggest possibilities.

God's Dreams: Altering History and Offering Perfection

God is perfectly just. He would not jeopardize Joseph's life or well being, had Joseph not warranted this sale. We learn that Joseph beautified himself. He also reported his brother's wrong doings to his father. He had an egoistic tendency, which was rightfully corrected as God humbled him in prison for many years. He publicized his dreams attracting unnecessary jealousy upon himself, which culminated in his sale and ultimately, his imprisonment. Thus, with Joseph's dreams, God clearly intended to perfect him. But that was not the only reason for the dreams. As we mentioned, the genius painter performed one stroke of his brush, and created a perfect picture with tremendous detail. God's dreams prophetically sent to Joseph had many ramifications.

Rabbi Chait taught that the dreams also provided perfection for the brothers, as Joseph was licensed through the dreams to place them into this trial regarding Benjamin. Simultaneously, this forced Jacob to part with Benjamin, perfecting Jacob as well, by

helping him restrain his excessive love for Benjamin, displaced from his beloved, departed wife Rachel. And we see that Joseph's plan is successful. As Rashi states, when Joseph embraced his father after all those years, we would think Jacob equally embraced his son Joseph. But he did not: he was preoccupied "reciting the Shema." Of course the Shema (Torah text) did not yet exist, but this metaphor means Joseph's plan to perfect his father worked: Jacob no longer directed his excessive love towards man, but now, towards God. He re-channeled his passions towards the Creator, as should be done.

So the dreams perfected Joseph by contributing to his sale and refinement of his ego, they enabled Joseph to perfect his brothers by forcing them to defend Benjamin, and they perfected his father as well, forcing him to break his bond to Rachel, expressed towards her son Benjamin. We might think these matters alone are amazing, that two dreams might offer so much good for so many. However, there is a great deal more to Joseph's dreams. Something even more astonishing.

Dream Instruction

We asked earlier how Joseph transformed into such a brilliant dream interpreter. How did he know that the dreams of the stewards and Pharaoh were true and Divine? What did Joseph know about dreams? All he had were his 2 dreams years earlier. Soon thereafter he was cast into prison for over a decade. However, those dreams offered Joseph more than we think.

What was Joseph doing in prison this entire time? Of course he must have had chores, and he was promoted to oversee the other inmates. But he had his solitude as well...time to think.

Having received tremendous knowledge from his father, the teachings of Shem and Aver, Joseph gained deep insight into how God rules the world, and interacts with mankind. He knew the concept of repentance, for he was soon to be the conductor of his family's repentance. He too must have reflected on his own state seeking repentance, "Why am I in prison? What is my sin?" He soon realized his dreams precipitated his descent into slavery, and that God gave him these dreams. He analyzed his dreams, and must have spent many hours, days, and weeks studying God's precise communications of the night. What did he discover?

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Pharaoh and His Stewards

10 years elapsed in prison. One day, Joseph saw the wine and bakery stewards were troubled by their dreams, and invited them to recount them before him. Joseph interpreted both dreams exactly in line with what happened: the wine steward was returned to his post, and the baker was hung. 2 more years elapse, and Joseph finds himself before Pharaoh. Pharaoh heard of Joseph's interpretive skills, and he too told Joseph his dreams. Again Joseph interprets the dreams with exact precision, and they come true. But if God did not tell Joseph the future, how did he know it? We now arrive at the core of the issue...

2 Divine Signs: Dreamer & Duplication

God's dreams granted to Joseph contained content, but they were also "instructive." God gave Joseph 2 dreams, for objectives in addition to perfecting his family and himself. What do I mean? Besides the "content" of the dreams, prophetic dreams also have a "style": 1) the chosen dream recipient, and 2) dream duplication.

Joseph received these dreams, and none other. He also received 2 dreams. Ramban states that 2 separate but similar dreams are unnatural: Pharaoh could have naturally seen both dreams' content concerning the cows and the ears in a single dream (Ramban, Gen. 41:32). Pharaoh didn't wake up and dream similar content again...unless it was divinely inspired. The same rule applies to the 2 stewards who dreamt similar dreams. And Joseph knew this. Joseph too had 2 separate dreams with similar content (Gen. 37:9). Ibn Ezra teaches that duplication in dreams indicates their divine origin: "[divine] dreams are doubled, as is the manner of prophecies" (Num. 12:6).

Joseph had many years to ponder his situation in prison, and much of what he may have pondered was the last event leading him into prison: his dreams. He knew they were from God, as he tells his brothers years later: "God sent me before you to place for you a remnant in the land and to sustain you..." (Gen. 45:7)

What did Joseph determine were indicative of divine dreams? He recognized dream duplication was unnatural. He also recognized that his dreams affected his perfection, so the "recipient" also indicates divine intent. These 2 elements were contained in the stewards' dreams and in Pharaoh's dreams. The stewards' dream duplications were a variation, but no less telling of their divine nature, since they both occurred the very same night, to 2 individuals, and they facilitated Joseph's release. Pharaoh also had 2 dreams, and of additional significance, it was "Pharaoh"—the man with the wherewithal to address the forecasted famine—who received the dreams.

Joseph understood from his own experience that dream duplication and a strategic dream recipient point to the dream's Divine nature. So convinced was Joseph of their divine origin that the recipient is of a telling nature, Joseph says to Pharaoh, "What God plans He has told to Pharaoh" (Gen. 41:25). Joseph meant to say, "Repetition, as well as your reception of this dream as opposed to another, indicates your dreams' divine nature." And

Joseph repeats this in verse 28.

Had God not granted Joseph these two divine dreams, Joseph would not have pondered dreams. He would not necessarily have studied their style, to the point that he was able to facilitate the good outcome God desired, by emancipating himself through the stewards' interpretations, and rising to viceroy applying his wisdom to Pharaoh's dreams.

Amazing!

God used dreams not only to perfect Jacob's household, but also to train Joseph in dream design and interpretation...the very matter essential for carving our Jewish history. The design of Joseph's dreams contained the blueprint for determining the divine nature of the other dreams he would interpret. In other words, his dreams were actually dream instructions, not just messages. This is akin to a coded message in an alien language, where the message content is one lesson, but the textual arrangement also contains hints to decipher this new language. Joseph's dreams' "content" contained a message for directing his perfecting of his family. But the dream "design" (selected recipient and duplication) taught him how to unravel dreams in general.

With a single brush stroke of Joseph's dreams, God 1) placed Joseph in prison to humble him, 2) He caused the brothers to repent, this time not abandoning their youngest brother, 3) He caused Jacob to perfect his excessive love, and 4) He trained Joseph in the art of dream interpretation...the science essential for the aforementioned perfections of Jacob, his sons, and Joseph!

The very dreams that caused Joseph's imprisonment, also provided his release, and helped sustain that generation.

We appreciate God's wisdom: with one action He effectuates the greatest good for so many. We also realize that without Joseph's appreciation that God teaches man with sublime wisdom, Joseph would not have engaged his own wisdom to discern God's will, nor would Joseph acquire the dream interpretation skills he discovered while in prison. But since Joseph had such deep knowledge of how God works, he turned all his efforts while in prison to analyzing his dreams, using wisdom to 1) uncover God's message, and 2) study dream style so as to determine which dreams are Divine, and how to interpret them.

A Fifth Message

Additionally, dreams—by definition—are a manifestation of "hidden" material. Understanding this, Joseph knew that if God communicates with His prophets in dreams, as stated in Numbers 12:6, it is for this reason. God wishes to indicate that just as dreams conceal deeper ideas, certainly God's dreams conceal deeper ideas to a greater degree. God's selected mode of communicating with His prophets via dreams is meant to underscore the principle that God's words too must undergo man's interpretation, if the intended message is to be discovered. With that appreciation, Joseph delved

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into the study of dreams, both prophetic and mundane. He also determined that dreams of divine origin contain a code, and once detected, can be interpreted. Joseph knew that wisdom is how God designed the world. Therefore, it is only with wisdom that man succeeds.

Relevance to Us

Does this lesson have any relevance in our lives? Without witnessing a miracle, we certainly cannot determine with any certainty that a given action is the hand of God. Maybe it is, maybe not. We do not know. We must review our successes and failures with the possibility that God's education of man can take one of 2 roads: 1) divine intervention for the individual, as with Joseph's dreams; or 2) natural laws of general providence, such as "boredom" with new acquisitions. God designed man's psyche to be frustrated with overindulgence in the physical pleasures, so as to redirect our energies back to the world of Torah wisdom. This is not individual providence, but a law of nature that applies equally to all members of mankind. Our consideration of our travails must straddle both spheres of God's workings. And since the Talmud teaches that prophecy has ceased, our dreams are not prophetic. However, there is a primary lesson that does apply to us all.

A Life of Wisdom

Joseph's approach to life was based on his knowledge that God created all. Thus, the world "naturally" functions according to God's wisdom. Despite the fact that God did not reveal

Pharaoh's or his stewards' interpretations, through his own interpretations, Joseph secured perfection and sustenance for his family and all of Egypt. Since he guided his actions purely based on wisdom, he was not in conflict with God's world that functions according to that same, singular wisdom. Rather, he was perfectly in line with it, as his successes teach. We too can perceive God's wisdom if we earnestly seek it out from His Torah. Wisdom is the key to success and happiness in all areas. We do not need God telling us anything more, or sending signs, just like Joseph did not need God to interpret the dreams. In fact, God has already intervened by giving His Torah to us all.

Viewing our misfortunes as divinely intended—"It's all for the good"—man deceives himself, and will repeat his errors. Maimonides teaches that most of our misfortunes are self-inflicted. It is only through following Torah—"Let us search our ways, analyze, and return to God" (Eicha 3:40)—analyzing our ways and determining whether they match Torah ideals, that we will avoid many misfortunes, and not need to falsely pacify ourselves with "It's all for the good." Using reason in all areas, and admitting our errors with a responsible analysis and internal change, we can engage wisdom to steer us to the truly good path, as God wills for all mankind, and is readily available without further intervention.

The Torah has all we need. Quick fixes like amulets, superstitious red bendels can't help us. They can't defend from God's punishments. They are also powerless to stop our foolishness. God says in Eicha that the approach to self-improvement and a good life is to engage wisdom, and to change our poor behaviors. ■





Change of Fortune

Yosef's confrontation
with immorality

Rabbi Reuven Mann

THIS WEEK'S PARSHA, Mikeitz, depicts the great miracle, which transformed Yosef's life and that of the Jewish People. Yosef, had been cast in prison over the false accusation of rape, which was hurled at him by Potiphar's wife. His great success in his master's service, led his wife to become fatally attracted to him.

For all his wisdom and ability to handle situations, Yosef lacked a solution to this problem. He responded to her advances with a seemingly firm refusal:

"...see my master concerns himself about nothing in the house, and whatever he has he has placed in my control. There is no one greater in this house than I, and he has denied me nothing but you, since you are his wife; how then can I perpetrate thus great evil and have sinned against G-d!" (Bereishis 39:8-9)

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This very reasoned argument, did not have the desired effect; for she continued her attempts at seduction, until the day came when he found himself alone with her—and had to suddenly flee—while she held on to his garment, that she had seized. His explanation made a lot of moral sense, but sophisticated reason, is no match for primal lust. His rejection, proved too much for her to handle, and she saw to it that he was cast into jail. It had to have been very painful for Yosef to suffer this setback, after all the progress he had made in the employ of Potiphar. And it is sheer agony for a righteous individual, to be suspected of a terrible transgression. But Yosef, must be viewed as the man who would not be broken. He accepted the decree of Heaven, and refrained from depression and self-pity. His Bitachon (trust) in Hashem, remained unblemished.

And, as the Ramban points out, he also retained his trust, in his own wisdom and understanding. He therefore, offered to interpret the dream of the Chief Butler; and confidently predicted that in just three days, he would be restored to his coveted position, in the service of Pharaoh.

Upon hearing the positive interpretation of his colleague's dream, the Chief Baker conveyed his dream to Yosef. Unfortunately, the prognosis was not a fortuitous one. Yosef, communicated the unhappy news, that in three days the Baker would be removed from prison and hung. And so the matter went. On the third day—Pharaoh's Yom Huledet (birthday)—the Chief Baker was executed, and the Butler was reinstated to his previous occupation.

Yosef, had clearly achieved a great advancement, in his struggle to rehabilitate his image and get himself out of incarceration. He now, reached out to the Butler—who would soon be free—and asked him, to intercede for him in the royal court:

"For if you would only think of me with you when he benefits you, and you would do me a kindness, if you please and mention me to Pharaoh, and remove me from this prison. For I was kidnapped from the land of the Hebrews, and also here I have done nothing for them to have put me in the dungeon." (Bereishis 40:14-15)

But this request, did not achieve its desired outcome. That is, because: "The Chief Butler did not remember Yosef and he forgot him." The Rabbis, inexplicably criticize Yosef for making this request; and assert that he should not have placed his trust in "proud ones" i.e. Egyptians.

Thus, as punishment, he had to languish in prison for another two years; until Pharaoh was in desperate need of someone—who could accurately interpret his mysterious dreams—that had stumped, all his magician and soothsayers. Now, that it was in his personal interests to introduce Yosef to Pharaoh, the Butler's memory was suddenly jolted.

However, the implication that Yosef was remiss, for soliciting a favor from the Butler, needs to be dealt with. For it goes against the fundamental Jewish principle of Hishtadlut (not relying on Divine Intervention). As the commentators explain, we may not "rely on miracles", but must do all in our power—to effectuate results—in a "natural" way. If Yosef saw an opportunity, to find his own way out of prison, he was obliged to take it; and that in no way signifies a lack of trust in Hashem. What then, is the problem, with what Yosef did?

Let us understand; what was the basis of Yosef's appeal to the Butler? Yosef, had offered to listen to and interpret his dream, with no expectation of reward. He did not say, "I'll interpret your dream, on the condition that you will repay me by soliciting my release from this dungeon".

Such behavior, would not have sanctified G-d's Name. It didn't cost Yosef anything, to listen to the dream and discover its meaning. So, on what basis should he have withheld his knowledge of the pleasant outcome, that awaited the Butler? Rather, Yosef went ahead and showed Chesed to the Butler, by relieving his anxiety, about the meaning of his dream.

However, after the fact, he also requested that the Butler display gratitude to Yosef, by "remembering him to Pharaoh". Why should the Butler do this favor, which had nothing in it for him? According to Yosef, it was because of the great principle of Hakarat HaTov (appreciation of a favor). In the Butler's moment of agony—when he was under an investigation for disloyalty to

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Pharaoh, which could have led to his execution—Yosef came through for him, and relieved him from great anxiety. Now, it was his turn to repay the favor, by using his offices to put in a proper word for Yosef. But here, Yosef was mistaken. The Butler, was a selfish individual, who operated on the principle of “taking care of number one”. When he left prison, he had no further need for Yosef, and very conveniently “forgot” his request. Sometimes, righteous people make the mistake of naively assuming that all people are “like them”; and they get hurt, when they discover that it’s just not true.

Yosef, very much wanted to believe that the Butler was a Tzadik, but he momentarily forgot the principle of “respect him and suspect him”. Perhaps—had he assessed the character of the Butler more accurately—he would have gone about the matter differently, and gotten a more helpful response.

Yosef, was clearly overestimating the moral level of the Egyptians. He needed to experience their shortcomings, and gain a renewed appreciation for his brothers and the Jewish people. It is important to remember, that this event took place, at a crucial moment in Yosef’s life. In two years, everything would change, and he would wield supreme power over Egypt and hold the fate of nations in his hands.

And, he would be brought together—once again, with his brothers—who would be totally dependent on his dictates. But, he had a choice to make about them.

What kind of people were they? Were they true descendants of Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov? Did their treatment of Yosef, reflect their real character? And, should he reunite with them or cast them away? It was essential for Yosef to carefully review matters, and recognize the deeper qualities of his brothers. In placing his trust in the Butler, he made the mistake of assuming, that the Egyptians were righteous people; who could be counted on to act in accordance with high moral principles. Yosef, had forgotten the special character of his family—which was based on the principles of behavior—which had been developed by the Avot.

It is worth quoting from Rav Soloveitchik on this matter. In the book, “Vision And Leadership” (p.17-18) he says:

“Why did G-d decree that the house of Jacob should be exiled to Egypt for so many years, be oppressed and tortured, enslaved and humiliated, and only “afterward shall they come out with great wealth (Gen.15:14)?

In my opinion, G-d wanted the children of Israel, and particularly their representative, Joseph, to appreciate the code of Abraham. Do not forget that they were born onto the house of Jacob where Abraham’s mores and moral laws prevailed. They were guided by Abraham’s principle of morality and Abraham’s ethics, whose basic cornerstones were mercy, charity, benevolence, kindness, appreciation, and human dignity. They had never seen evil or cruelty. They had never experienced a life governed by other principles.

There is an old idea that one begins to appreciate one’s most precious treasures—freedom, health, parents, friendship—only after one loses it. The household of Jacob did not appreciate Abraham. I know it from my own childhood. Many times I could not understand what was so great about our household. I was brought up in a house of rabbis, in a scholarly home, but I used to find fault with my father, with my grandfather, and so forth. No one could convince me until I spent a number of years among gentiles, among Germans. I spent time among the best of society in the academic community, and I saw many people who were supposed to be very ethical and moral. But I began to compare them with my grandfather or father and I realized the difference. My confrontation with a non-Jewish society opened up a new world for me. It was as if a shining star had appeared on the horizon, as if a comet had suddenly exploded. I realized that my grandfather, Reb Hayyim would have acted differently, that my father would have helped this person. In order to appreciate the good, you need to be confronted with evil. In order to appreciate traditional Jewish charity, you need to be confronted with cruelty.”

By assuming he could trust an ordinary Egyptian, Yosef was forgetting the unique morality, that governed the descendants of Avraham. He needed to experience disappointment, at the hands of the Butler, and two more years of incarceration; to recognize the special character of his own family, and the great spiritual potential of his brothers. True, they had committed an egregious wrong, but that was because of a serious misunderstanding of Yosef’s intentions; to which he had himself contributed, with his reckless tail-bearing and publicizing of his dreams of grandeur. Yosef, then recognized, that his brothers were not entirely at fault, and at bottom, were disciples of Avraham; who still retained their identity as Shivtei Kah (Tribes of G-d). His goal upon meeting them, was to facilitate their Teshuva and complete reunification. When Yosef finally did see his brothers at the gates of Egypt, the verse attests, “Yosef recognized his brothers, but they didn’t recognize him.” He now appreciated the unique qualities of the Jewish people, and acted in a manner that would assure their survival and well-being.

This story has great relevance for us. Today, there are many diverse factions in the Jewish People, and much dispute and contentiousness. Sometimes we despair and feel like giving up on our fellow Jews but that would be a great mistake.

The story of Chanukah recounts, that at a time of great calamity, the Jews rose to the occasion and put their very existence on the line, in order to save the Torah way of life. We must always retain a sense of appreciation for Am Yisrael (the Nation of Israel)—which was chosen by Hashem—to fill the world with knowledge of G-d and His Glory.

Shabbat Shalom—Chag Urim Sameach. ■



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CONDÉ NAST





PERFECTION VS. WISDOM

Rabbi Israel Chait

STUDENT: Rashi on Gen. 24:42 reads as follows:

Rabbi Acha said, "More pleasant before God is the speech of the servants of the patriarchs, than the Torah (commands) of their children, as we find Eliezer's account doubled in the Torah, while many of the central commands of the Torah are only given by way of hints."

Question: What trait—indicated in Eliezer's speech—surpassed the Torah of Bnei Yisrael, that Torah provided more coverage about Eliezer than Torah's commands?

RABBI CHAIT: Rashi (Ibid. 24:39) says the word is read "ulay" (perhaps), but is spelled "ailay" meaning "to me"—that is, to me (my daughter) should Isaac marry. Eliezer had a daughter and he was seeking to find some reason why Abraham should accept his daughter in marriage to Isaac. Abraham said to him, "My son is blessed and you are subject to a curse. One who is under a curse cannot unite with one who is blessed." As a servant, Eliezer's daughter was unfit to wed Isaac. Nonetheless, Eliezer conquered his desire and sought another girl. Thereby he displayed perfection. A servant is usually on a lesser level, but Eliezer's perfection outshined the patriarchs' childrens' Torah. Drawing close to God is sometimes achieved by a servant even more than by a son. Perfection outweighs Torah. Eliezer invested his full energies to fulfill Abraham's will. His lengthy plea provided many opportunities to abbreviate his words (an abbreviation would express his desire for his daughter to marry Isaac). But Eliezer did not abbreviate his words. This reveals that he conquered his desire and invested all his energies to fulfill Abraham's wishes to find some other wife for Isaac. Eliezer's elongated pleas to Lavan and Besuale displayed a servant fully engaged in following his master's wishes. ■

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A Time to CELEBRATE

Rabbi Reuven Mann



The Holidays of Chanukah and Purim are very similar. Both commemorate great miracles of national salvation that mark the history of the Jewish People. Indeed our past is one of extremes; either of suffering and annihilation or of supreme victories over our enemies.

The key feature of these two Rabbinic festivals is that of miracles. That is to say events that occur outside the framework of the natural order and have a metaphysical causation. Thus on Purim we read the Megilla of Esther which describes the sequence of happenings which led to the rescue of the Jews from the wicked hands of Haman. The objective of this public reading is the same as the lighting of the Menorah; to publicize the miracle.

But when it comes to Chanukah the identification of the miracle is not so clear. It would seem that the fact that a cruise with enough oil for just one day kept going for eight days would be

miracle enough. But the Al Hanisim prayer offers praise to the A-Mighty for the military defeat of the Greek forces by the “few against the many”. So in effect it seems as though two distinct wonders are celebrated on Chanukah.

A significant difference between Chanukah and Purim is the manner in which they are celebrated. Purim is a time of great rejoicing through the giving of gifts, partying and drinking. However Chanukah has a much more serious demeanor. The essential focus is on recitation of the Hallel and other compositions of praise. But there is no obligation to rejoice by physical indulgences of food and wine. Yet this is the time when the Jews preserved their right to practice Judaism and live according to the Torah way of life. Isn't that cause for great rejoicing?

In this regard it should be pointed out that joy is a vital component of our divine service. The Rambam points this out and bases it on the verse in the Tochecha (Rebuke) which asserts that the Jews will be punished because “you did not serve Hashem, your G-d, amid gladness and goodness of heart, out of abundance.” It would seem fitting, therefore, that the celebration of the miracles by which we were successful in rescuing our religion of Torah and Mitzvot should include manifestations of simcha (joy). And yet we are not commanded to arrange parties. Why not?

I believe the answer lies in understanding the real miracle of Chanukah. Why was it necessary for Hashem to cause the Menorah to miraculously burn for eight days? If no kosher oil were available there would have been no problems since we have the principle of “one who has no ability to control the situation is exempt.” The Jews would simply have waited until new pure oil could be produced and then lighted the Menorah.

Moreover the Al Hanisim prayer speaks only of the miracle of the military victory and doesn't even mention the phenomenon of the lights. What is the reason for that omission? Rabbi Israel Chait explained that the fundamental miracle of Chanukah was that the Maccabees defeated the superior Greek forces and retook control over the Temple and the practice of Judaism.

The victory was an instance of the “few against the many” but in all such cases, where no natural laws are broken, the question arises whether the outcome was within the laws of nature or miraculous. The Rabbis were able to resolve this dilemma on the basis of the neis (miracle) of the lights. They concluded that it was a sign from Hashem that it was

His intervention that had made the victory possible.

Without this “communication” from Hashem the Jews could possibly have believed that it was their own strength and power which had achieved the great win. That is an extremely dangerous phenomenon. We have had a similar experience in our lifetimes. The Israeli victory in the Six Day War produced a profound sense of exaltation in the Israeli military prowess. This produced a feeling of extreme overconfidence in the capabilities of the Jewish state and contempt for the fighting aptitude of the Arab enemy. This distorted state of mind was in large measure responsible for the Israel's being taken by surprise and suffering tremendous losses in the Yom Kippur War.

In my opinion the Rabbis did not Institute an obligation to party because this could lead to a feeling of pride in the warlike capabilities of the Maccabees. Indeed one of the reasons for the great popularity of Chanukah among Jews who are generally not observant is that it symbolizes Jewish strength and physical courage.

But this is a distortion of the truth. The miracle of the lights attests that the Jews won because and only because Hashem was with them. Anything which takes away from that idea and encourages the perception that it was sheer physical might which determined the outcome is contrary to the true objective of the celebration of Chanukah.

Purim is a different story. There the Jews were slated for destruction at the hands of the wicked Haman. It was only because Hashem had mercy on them and caused Achashverosh to rescind the evil decree that they were saved. And that great miracle took place after they responded to the initiative of Esther and fasted in Repentance for three days and nights.

Judaism assiduously refrains from the glorification of man. Greek culture, on the other hand, is rooted in the denial of G-d and the elevation of man as the highest form of existence. This was the underlying cause of their determination to wipe out Judaism and compel the Jews to abandon Hashem. Chanukah is therefore dedicated exclusively to expressing praise and acknowledgement to the Creator.

The battle against the Greeks and the resistance to Haman is a constant ongoing theme in Jewish History. We are always fighting those battles. May we be inspired by our great heroes of the past and rededicate ourselves to the eternal mission of the Jewish People; to proclaim the glory of Hashem to the entire world. ■



Celebrating Purim on CHANNUKA

Rabbi Bernie Fox

For this reason, the Sages of that generation established that these eight days that begin with the night of the 25th of Kislev are days of rejoicing and Hallel. And we light candles at night on them at the doors of houses – each night of the eight nights. These days are called Chanukah. And eulogies and fasting are prohibited on them as on the days of Purim. The lighting of candles on them is a mitzvah of the Sages like the reading of the Megilah [on Purim]. (Rambam Mishne Torah, Hilchot Chanukah 3:3)

I. Creating new commandments

In his code of Torah Law, the Mishne Torah, Rambam – Maimonides – combines the laws of Purim and Chanukah in a single section. Chanukah and Purim are the only two celebrations created by the Sages. Rambam emphasizes this shared origin in the above quotation. He explains that lighting the Chanukah candles is a mitzvah created by the Sages. Its origin is the same as the mitzvah to read the Megilah on Purim.

Their shared origin explains another aspect of Rambam's presentation. Chanukah precedes Purim on the calendar. Shulchan Aruch – the standard code of Torah law – discusses Chanukah before Purim. Rambam does not follow this order. He opens with a discussion of the mitzvah of Megilah and the celebration of Purim. After concluding that discussion, he introduces Chanukah and its mitzvot. Why does Rambam choose this order?

Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik Zt"l explains that the mitzvah of reading the Megilah on Purim provides the basis for the creation of Chanukah. Purim and reading the Megilah are unique innovations. The Torah authorizes the Sages to make decrees and to establish practices. However, these measures are designed to reinforce and support the Torah's mitzvot. Before the creation of Purim and Megilah reading, the Sages limited their legislation to protecting and promoting the Torah's six hundred thirteen mitzvot. They did not originate new mitzvot. In creating the commandment to read the Megilah, they

broke new ground.

The Talmud asks from where the Sages derived the authority to create a new commandment. It concludes that the Sages based their decision on a valid precedent. (1) But this precedent does not detract from the uniqueness of Megilah reading and Purim. Megilah reading is a new mitzvah created by the Sages. It is not a decree instituted to reinforce or safeguard the observance of one of the Torah's six hundred thirteen mitzvot.

II. Purim is a precedent

This innovation established the basis for Chanukah's mitzvot – lighting the Chanukah candles and reciting the Hallel. When the miracles of Chanukah occurred, the Sages did not need to consider whether they had the authority to create new mitzvot to recall and commemorate these events. This issue was considered, weighed, and resolved by a previous generation of Sages who established Purim and Megilah reading. Chanukah is based on Purim. Therefore, Rambam first describes the mitzvah of Megilah reading and then the mitzvot of Chanukah. (2)

All those who are obligated in reading the Megilah are obligated in lighting the Chanukah candles. (Rambam Mishne Torah, Hilchot Chanukah 3:4)

III. Another connection

The previous discussion explains Rambam's comparison of Chanukah to Purim. Chanukah

is based on Purim. Rambam adds that those who are obligated in the mitzvah of Megilah reading are obligated in the mitzvah of the Chanukah candles. What message is he communicating? The popular response is that his intention is to include women in the obligation. Women are often exempt from positive commandments that must be performed at a fixed time. However, this exemption does not apply to the mitzvah of reading the Megilah. Women are obligated in this mitzvah. Rambam is explaining that women are obligated also to light the Chanukah candles.

This explanation is not adequate. It does not explain his phrasing. He should have said, "Women are obligated to light Chanukah candles." Why does he refer to Purim? The implication of his phrasing is that the obligation to light Chanukah candles is dependent upon and engendered by the obligation to read the Megilah. Therefore, one who is obligated in the Megilah is obligated in the Chanukah candles. He is explaining that men and women are obligated in the Chanukah candles because they are obligated in the Megilah. How does the obligation to read the Megilah create the obligation to light the Chanukah candles?

IV. A basic Torah principle

The answer is based on a far-reaching and very basic principle. When we give thanks to Hashem for a specific kindness or salvation, we do not limit our thanks to that event or phenomenon. We acknowledge individual acts of kindness as manifestations of Hashem's constant and pervasive kindness. We are prompted to give thanks by a specific kindness, but we extend our acknowledgment beyond this particular.

Blessed are You, our L-rd, King of the universe, Who bestows good on the unworthy, Who has bestowed on me much good. (Birkat HaGomel) (3)

V. Illustrations of the principle

There are many illustrations of this principle. When a person encounters danger and is saved, one recites a blessing – Birkat HaGomel. The blessing is recited when one recovers from a serious illness. One recites it when escaping a dangerous accident. The text of the blessing is above. The blessing acknowledges Hashem has bestowed good on the unworthy. With this statement, the person expresses thanks for His kindness just received. Then, one adds that Hashem bestows much good. With this statement, the person acknowledges that Hashem's kindness is pervasive.

Birkat HaMazon – the grace recited after a meal – also illustrates this principle. The Torah commands us to offer thanks after eating. It requires that we thank Hashem for the food we have eaten and for granting us the Land of Israel. Birkat HaMazon is composed of four benedictions. In the first, we acknowledge that Hashem provides us with food and sustains us. In the second benediction, we thank Him for the Land of Israel. However, this benediction then continues. We acknowledge that Hashem

redeemed us from Egypt, entered with us into a covenant, gave us the Torah, and bestowed upon us other kindnesses. We conclude, "And for everything, Hashem, our L-rd we give You thanks." Eating a meal obligates us to give thanks to Hashem. But when we respond, we do not thank Him for just our food. We extend our thanksgiving to include other kindnesses.

VI. Chanukah complements Purim

This principle explains Rambam's phrasing. Who is obligated to light the Chanukah candles? Those obligated to read the Megilah. Rambam is explaining that when the Sages created Chanukah they did not rely on Purim as only a technical basis. With the creation of Purim, emerged an obligation to identify other similar events. (4) When we celebrate Chanukah, we are recognizing that the salvation commemorated by Purim was not a single, unique event. Hashem saved us many times. Chanukah commemorates one of these occasions. In other words, the observance of Chanukah complements our observance of Purim. Those obligated to read the Megilah must also light the Chanukah candles. Their observance of the Chanukah mitzvah enhances their observance of Purim.

VII. Recognizing our blessings

Birkat HaGomel, Birkat HaMazon, and Chanukah illustrate a single principle. When we give thanks to Hashem, we do not limit our thanks to a specific event or phenomenon. We expand our thanks to include other expressions of Hashem's kindness. Why is this important? Why must we extend our thanks beyond the specific? If we thank Hashem for only a specific kindness, then we treat that kindness as unique and extraordinary. We do not recognize that the specific is an expression of Hashem's constant and pervasive kindness. When we see only the specific, we do not recognize all our blessings. When we look beyond the specific and recognize all the kindnesses we received, we realize we are blessed every moment of every day. ■

Footnotes

(1) Mesechet Megilah 14a.

(2) Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, 'Concerning the Relationship between the Chanukah Candles and the Mitzvah of Megilah Reading' Mesorah, Adar 5757, pp 14-15.

(3) Translation by Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, Koren Siddur.

(4) The principal prayer added to the services on Purim is Al HaNissim. In it, we acknowledge that Hashem saved us from Haman. This prayer is added into the benediction of the Amidah in which we give thanks to Hashem for all He does for us. It is also added into the second blessing of Birkat HaMazon. This is the blessing cited above in which we thank Hashem for all His kindnesses. The reason Al HaNissim is added into these benedictions is that the benediction and Al HaNissim complement one another. When we recite Al HaNissim, it is appropriate for us to also acknowledge Hashem's other kindnesses. On Purim, when we recite the blessing of the Amidah and Birkat HaMazon and give thanks to Hashem, it is appropriate to recall the salvation commemorated on that day. We recite Al HaNissim also on Chanukah. We follow that same practice as on Purim for the same reasons.

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