

# The Narrow Bridge

## גשר צר מאד

# PARSHA PERSPECTIVES

### Short Divrei Torah on Parshas Mikeitz

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לע'ג פועל בת ישראל מנוח / לזכות חילינו

#### NEUTRALIZING EVIL

##### Lubavitcher Rebbe

*"It came to pass at the end of two full years, that Pharaoh was dreaming..." (41:1)*

Yaakov was the central spiritual figure of his generation, and Yosef was the one who was able to channel Yaakov's spiritual energy into the world. Therefore, the spiritual dimension of everyone's life took its cue from Yosef's. Since Yosef learned of his future through dreams, Pharaoh also learned about the future of his land through dreams.

The same is true in every generation. The spiritual dimension of the world at large takes its cue from the world's collective "Yosef" - the Jewish people. Even forces that oppose G-dliness derive power from us, either by capitalizing on the negative energy produced by our misdeeds or by challenging us to tap potentials that would otherwise remain dormant.

When we encounter evil, we are apt to assume that it possesses its own power, and therefore be intimidated by it, or even seduced by it. Instead, we should recognize that evil is nothing more than a reflection of our own shortcomings or simply a challenge designed to elicit our dormant spiritual powers. It will then neither intimidate nor tantalize us.

By rectifying our own shortcomings and rising to life's challenges, we cut off evil's supply of power, thereby bringing spiritual sustenance to the entire world. (Likutey Sichot, vol. 3, pp. 819-820) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

#### SEEKING HASHEM

##### Rebbe Nachman

*"And it came to the end of two years and Pharaoh was dreaming..." (41:1)*

*Shenatayim yamim* (two years) literally means "two years of days." When a person is searching for G-d, each day is as valuable as a year. (See Likutey Moharan II, 2:6)

#### BRINGING MASHIACH

##### Shinover Rebbe

*"And it came to the end of two years and Pharaoh was dreaming..." (41:1)*

*Mikeitz* ("in the end") refers to the days that call for Mashiach. Mashiach would not come unless we give from our hearts. This means that we would be concerned for the welfare of others and not only for ourselves.

#### PROTECTED WEALTH

##### Reb Noson of Breslov

*"And it came to the end of two years and Pharaoh was dreaming..." (41:1)*

Pharaoh dreamt about seven fat cows that were swallowed up by seven scrawny cows. Pharaoh represents one who has great wealth yet always craves more, as if he is always hungry. His name, Pharaoh (פרעה), resembles *Peiraon* (פרעון, repayment). Pharaoh always must make payments, whether he is buying material goods for his comfort or paying off his debts.

Yosef, the tzaddik, advises him to "tax" the bounty at twenty percent. In other words, Yosef advises the wealthy to "tax their wealth" by giving to charity, an act that will protect their wealth. (Likutey Halakhot II, p. 79a)

#### WHERE CREDIT IS DUE

##### Rabbi Moshe Schochet

*"And it came to the end of two years and Pharaoh was dreaming..." (41:1)*

The Medrash tells us that the beginning of the *pasuk* refers to the two additional years when Yosef languished in jail, which were coming to an end. Why does the Torah introduce the *parsha* with these words? We already know that Yosef was still in jail based on the conclusion of last week's *parsha*. The Torah should have simply begun with Pharaoh having dreams...

The Beis HaLevi explains based on a *mashal*. Imagine someone were to purchase something that subsequently went up in value, and it caused him or her to become prosperous. Most people would naturally attribute the affluence to the buyer's decision to acquire the item. The Beis HaLevi suggests that, in reality, the person was successful not because of any efforts on his or her part, rather solely because Hashem decided that he or she should be successful. In order to ensure that the person became wealthy, Hashem made sure that whatever he or she invested in resulted in wealth.

The same is true with the story of Yosef. Had the Torah begun with Pharaoh's dream, one would think that the reason that Yosef was released from prison was because Pharaoh had a dream. However, the Torah begins by telling us that Yosef was still in jail and Hashem intended to free Yosef. How was Hashem going to liberate Yosef? Hashem orchestrated that Pharaoh would have dreams that needed to be interpreted by Yosef. As a result, Yosef would be freed from incarceration. This is the reason why the Torah begins with Yosef remaining in jail. The Torah's mention of Yosef in jail sets the stage for Hashem's plan of causing Pharaoh to have dreams.

This idea is highlighted even further in the ensuing *pesukim*. After Yosef concluded interpreting Pharaoh's dreams, he offered a strategy of how to navigate the years of plenty in order to ensure the survival of Egypt along with the surrounding countries. Yosef seemed to imply that he should be the one to oversee the plan. Rav Yisrael Meir Druck (Eish Tamid) wonders why Yosef wasn't hesitant to nominate himself for this position? After all, the last time he tried to get a job by requesting that the *sar hamashkim*, the royal butler, mention his name to Pharaoh, he was punished with an additional two years of imprisonment for lacking *emunah* in Hashem and placing his faith in the *sar hamashkim*.

Rav Druck explains that there is one basic difference between these two instances. Prior to Pharaoh sharing his dreams with Yosef, Pharaoh attempted to praise Yosef by sharing that he heard that Yosef had successfully interpreted dreams in the past. Yosef deflected the credit and instead highlighted that his successes were solely due to what Hashem allowed him to understand and interpret. Instead of simply taking matters into his own hands as if he was in charge, in the way that he did two years earlier, Yosef made clear to Pharaoh (and himself) Who was really in charge. Once Yosef gave credit where credit was due, he was then comfortable putting forth his own efforts on behalf of himself.

We often find ourselves attempting to balance our faith in Hashem with our requirement to exert maximum energy towards achieving our personal and professional goals. The Torah is teaching us that while we are certainly obligated to put in *hishtadlus* - effort, to realize our ambitions, we must first ensure that our hard work is predicated on the recognition that Hashem is in charge. With this approach, we, like Yosef, will be able to reach our full potential with Hashem's unwavering support.

## TEACHINGS OF THE TZADDIK

### Reb Noson of Breslov

*"Behold! Seven cows, beautiful of appearance and of healthy flesh, emerged from the river and grazed in the marshland." (41:2)*

The seven healthy cows represent the tzaddikim. They are called "healthy" because "A tzaddik eats to satisfy his soul" (Mishlei 13:25). By acquiring and disseminating faith, the tzaddik teaches other people how to satisfy their souls.

Later, Yosef told Pharaoh (Bereishis 41:34), "Ration the produce of Egypt." *Vechimeish* (וְנָתַן, ration) is similar to *Chameish* (תַּנֵּן, five), which represents the Five Books of the Torah. The rations of one's spiritual food are the Torah. The tzaddik shows us how to store up spiritual energy for the lean years. (Likutey Halakhot V, p. 50a)

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The seven healthy cows in Pharaoh's dream represent prayer, as in "Seven times a day I have praised You" (Tehillim 119:164). The seven scrawny cows represent the thoughts that overcome a person during his prayers, causing him to think that his prayers are worthless. The person then strengthens himself and begins to pray another time, but again evil thoughts rise up and disturb his prayers.

Pharaoh found the solution to his dream by relying on Yosef, the tzaddik. Yosef teaches us to grab hold of the good when it is present and store it up, so that we can face the hardships that come later.

## STORING UP GOODNESS

### Rabbi Chaim Kramer

*"Behold! Seven cows, beautiful of appearance and of healthy flesh, emerged from the river and grazed in the marshland." (41:2)*

The *parshah* begins with Pharaoh's dream. What was that dream? He saw seven fat cows and seven ripe stalks; then came seven lean cows and seven dried-up stalks. He saw that the lean cows and dried-up stalks swallowed the fat cows and consumed the ripe stalks. That was his dream.

Reb Noson explains that this is the dream of the evil person, Pharaoh. Many times, we find blessing in our lives (seven indicating many times). We are happy, we are content, we are upbeat in our outlook on life.

Along comes Pharaoh. Along come challenges, frustrations, difficulties. We become despondent, angered, and frustrated, to the point that everything seems lost. So much so that we completely forget we did have good times! Times that are "swallowed up" by the challenges we face. This is Pharaoh's dream: to make us forget that there were good times. To conceal the fact that there are always ups and downs in life. He wants us to never remember that there was, is, and will be good times.

The solution to Pharaoh's dream is Yosef, who advises, "Store from your good times and remember to keep them foremost in your mind. Then, when the difficult moments arrive, you will remember that there was good, and it will pass." How? Because you've stored in your mind that there was good and there will be good times to come.

The powers of Pharaoh, of evil, want a person to linger in despair with no hope of ever seeing good. "Swallowed up," as it were. On the other hand, Yosef, the tzaddik, encourages people to believe that good does exist and that we can emerge from the lean times into salvation.

## UNASSUMING TACTICS

### Sefas Emes

*"Then, behold! - seven other cows emerged after them out of the canal - of poor appearance and lean flesh; and they stood next to the cows on the bank of the canal. And the cows of poor appearance and lean flesh ate the seven cows of beautiful appearance and robust..."* (41:3-4)

Interpreting the "lean cows" as an allegorical representation of the evil inclination, on this passage the Sages base their statement that when the evil inclination comes to a person it acts like a transient at first, then like a guest, and finally like a master, ruling over the person and the person's household.

The seven lean cows behaved toward the seven well-favored cows in the same manner as the evil inclination acts when it confronts a person. At first, they "came up after them," slowly and inconspicuously. Then they "stood by" them like guests in their pasture, and finally, they "swallowed them up" altogether.

## IT TAKES HARD WORK

### Lubavitcher Rebbe

*"Then the seven thin ears swallowed up the seven healthy and full ears; and Pharaoh awoke and behold! - [it was] a dream."* (41:7)

The content of Pharaoh's dreams differed profoundly from that of Yosef's. Pharaoh dreamed of animals and produce but not of work. Yosef's dreams, in contrast, began with the image of work - the brothers gathering sheaves in the field.

This reflects the difference between how G-d provides sustenance for holy and less holy people.

G-d sustains holy people directly, in deserved reward for their earnest work in aligning themselves with His will.

In contrast, less holy people balk at the idea of self-discipline and work; G-d therefore only sustains them because He has to in order for them to continue to exist.

Moreover, sustenance received without effort is flawed goodness, since human nature is such that we do not truly appreciate something gained without effort.

Similarly, when we are tempted to think that we can get by without hard work, we must realize that such notions stem from our less holy side. Likewise, anything we receive "for free" is either flawed or will not endure. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 3, pp. 805-810, 820-822) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnfsky

## BEYOND NATURE

### Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

*"And he called all the necromancer of Egypt and all its wise men. And Pharaoh related the dream to them, but none could interpret them for Pharaoh."* (41:8)

Rashi writes: "They interpreted the dreams, but it did not enter into Pharaoh's ears and he did not have relief from their interpretation. They said, 'You will father seven daughters, you will bury seven daughters.'" Why was it so hard for the Egyptian wise men to come up with a proper interpretation? In hindsight, Yosef's explanation seems so logical compared to what they dreamed up.

Rav Yechezkel Abramsky zt'l denotes a fundamental distinction between the way the Egyptians and Yosef interpreted dreams. The Egyptians looked at the world in definite terms of physicality and nature. Their interpretations had to make sense in their small-minded and terrestrial brains, and everything had to conform to the laws of nature. Thus, they babbled on with meaningless expositions, just as long as they fit into their way of thinking. Yosef, on the other hand, looked at the world through a Divine prism; he was blessed with the ability to see things exactly the way Hashem created them.

Nature is constant, but Hashem maintains the power to go beyond the natural and employ the supernatural when He sees fit. Thus, Yosef said to Pharaoh, "The L-rd will answer for Pharaoh's benefit" (41:16). The words are not my words, and the meaning is not from me; it is from Hashem! In order to arrive at the truth, it is not in the ability of a human mind to understand the world if not for the Almighty guiding and explaining it all to him.

In fact, on Chanukah we recognize this concept in the words of *Al Hanissim*: "You have delivered the strong at the hands of the weak; many at the hands of the few." The Greeks, much like the Egyptians, lived by the rules of nature. But Hashem rescued the Jewish nation in a supernatural fashion, unrestrained by earthly limits, for He loves His people and will do anything to protect and secure them.

## FINDING THE "SWALLOWED" GOOD

### Reb Noson of Breslov

*"And he called all the necromancer of Egypt and all its wise men. And Pharaoh related the dream to them, but none could interpret them for Pharaoh."* (41:8)

Only Yosef was able to interpret Pharaoh's dream correctly. Good and evil (the healthy cows and the scrawny cows) always exist in the world, and it appears that evil always conquers the good. But the tzaddik, who is able to overcome evil, can show that there is good even within evil, even if the good has been "swallowed up" by the evil.

Later, Yosef advises the Egyptians to put away food to tide them over during the forthcoming years of famine. In this way, he taught others to take advantage of the good days and good times and store up one's good deeds in this world. Then, even in the bad days, in times of evil, one will have good to fall back on.

## **FIRST IMPRESSIONS**

### **Rabbi Efrem Goldberg**

*"A Hebrew youth was there with us, a servant of the chief steward; and when we told him our dreams, he interpreted them for us, telling each of the meaning of his dream." (41:12)*

Pharaoh was not satisfied with the interpretations of his dream given by his advisors. The **שר המשקדים** (cupbearer) then spoke up, and recalled the dreams that he and the baker had dreamt in prison, which Yosef, their fellow inmate, had correctly interpreted. Pharaoh promptly summoned Yosef from the dungeon to interpret his dreams, which he of course did, to Pharaoh's satisfaction.

Rashi (41:12) comments that when the **שר המשקדים** described Yosef, he did so with scorn and disdain, as a **עריר עבד** לשר הטבחים - emphasizing that Yosef was young (**עריר**), a foreigner (**עריר**), and a slave (**עבד**). The cupbearer disliked Yosef, and so although he felt obliged to recommend his services to Pharaoh, he wanted to ensure that Pharaoh would not appoint Yosef to any sort of prominent position.

Rav Yisroel Meir Druck, in Eish Tamid, raises the question of why the cupbearer thought that his negative characterization of Yosef would have had any effect. He obviously assumed that Yosef would give a correct interpretation of Pharaoh's dream; this was his entire purpose in recommending him. Did he not realize that Pharaoh would admire Yosef's talents? How would his derisive portrayal of Yosef affect Pharaoh's perception of Yosef, once Yosef displayed his brilliance by correctly explaining the meaning of the king's dreams?

Rav Druck answered this question based on the concept taught by the Chafetz Chaim and others regarding the severity of the sin of *lashon hara* and gossip. Speaking negatively about people is so grievous because it makes an indelible impression in the listener's mind. If we hear unflattering information about somebody, then even if we get to know that person well, and we see that the negative characterization we had heard was incorrect, even so, we entertain doubts in our minds. As the saying goes, "You only have one chance to make a first impression."

Our initial impression of somebody becomes imprinted in our minds. And so, when a person shares a piece of gossip, or speaks of someone derogatorily, he paints a negative picture of that individual in the listener's mind which can never be completely erased. That first impression is likely to remain forever.

This explains the intent of the **שר המשקדים**. He wanted to ensure that although Pharaoh would assuredly be impressed by Yosef's wisdom and talents, he would still have a somewhat negative picture of Yosef in his mind. The **שר המשקדים** knew that if he imprinted in Pharaoh's mind a negative first impression of Yosef, Pharaoh would never be too impressed by Yosef, and would never afford him too much respect.

Pharaoh, to his credit, did not seem to be affected by the **שר המשקדים**'s disdainful characterization of Yosef. He was truly impressed by Yosef, and held him in high esteem, disregarding entirely the **שר המשקדים**'s attempts at besmirching him. Nevertheless, the lesson being taught is that we must exercise extreme care when speaking about other people, because the way we portray people plants an image in the listener's mind that could very likely remain for years to come.

## **IN A BLINK OF AN EYE**

### **Rabbi Dovid Hoffman**

*"So Pharaoh sent and summoned Yosef, and they rushed him from the pit..." (41:14)*

Yosef was languishing in prison for years at the mercy of his captors. He thought that by asking the wine steward to mention him to Pharaoh it might hasten his release. To his dismay, not only did it not hasten his release, but it prolonged his agony.

However, at the very moment that Hashem decided that Yosef should go free, he was rushed out of jail with an urgency that sharply contrasted with the humdrum daily existence that was his constant companion in the depths of the Egyptian dungeon.

The Chafetz Chaim zt'l remarks that this is the way Hashem brings about redemption. The moment it is meant to take place, not a split second is lost. This, says the Chafetz Chaim, is the way the Final Redemption will come as well. When the time is right, we will all be rushed to greet Mashiach and our lives will suddenly, and without warning, be radically changed.

On a personal level, every individual is locked up in situations of pain, sadness, or difficulty. There are times that we almost give up hope that the situation can improve and therefore our prayers and relationship with Hashem are stunted, rather than strengthened...

But a Jew should never lose faith. His salvation can come in the blink of an eye. It can happen so suddenly that he won't even know what hit him. As much as we feel that our situation is difficult, we must believe that Hashem can do anything - and do it quickly!

This is what we should learn from Yosef being rushed out of jail. It is also important to realize this on Chanukah, which is a time of great miracles and redemption and is uniquely effective for both collective redemption and personal salvation. May we all be *zocheh* to our own redemptions, both on a personal and national level, in the blink of an eye.

## WHEN THE SKIES DARKEN

### Rabbi Efrem Goldberg

*"So Pharaoh sent and summoned Yosef, and they rushed him from the pit..." (41:14)*

*Parshas Mikeitz* continues the story of Yosef, telling of the dramatic reversal of Yosef's fortune. He was languishing in an Egyptian dungeon until he was suddenly brought before Pharaoh, having been recommended to the king by the שָׁרֵן (cupbearer) to interpret the king's unusual dreams. Pharaoh was pleased by Yosef's interpretation, and immediately appointed him viceroy over the kingdom. In an instant, Yosef was lifted from the depths of despair to the heights of royalty.

Rav Yisroel Meir Druck, in *Lahavos Eish*, draws our attention to the vital lesson of *emunah* that emerges from this episode.

Years earlier, Yosef faced an unimaginably difficult test. Working as a slave for Potifar, his master's wife desired a relationship with him, and desperately tried to seduce him. Yosef, a teenage boy far away from home, working as a slave, had nothing to lose by accepting her advances - except, of course, his morality and his spirituality. He heroically refused, resisting her seduction each and every day, until finally he fled, whereupon she falsely accused him of assaulting her.

Yosef was then imprisoned. A person in Yosef's position would likely have turned to Hashem and said, "Seriously, Hashem? This is my reward for doing the right thing, for resisting temptation, for overcoming such a difficult test? This is what I get?"

And Yosef was in prison not for just several days, weeks, or even months. He sat languishing in the dungeon for thirteen years. It seemed that he would remain there for the rest of his life - all because he withstood the most difficult test to his religious commitment!

As it turned out, though, this was precisely where Yosef needed to be in order to achieve greatness. It was because he was there in the dungeon that he ended up interpreting the dreams of the שָׁרֵן and שָׁרֵן (cupbearers), which led to the שָׁרֵן (recommendation) of Yosef to Pharaoh. As a result, he became viceroy of Egypt, saved Egypt and the surrounding countries from starvation during the famine, and was ultimately reunited with his family. If he had not been thrown into prison, he would have remained a slave for Potifar. He would never have risen to royalty, he would have starved during the famine along with the rest of Egypt, and he would never have seen his father or brothers again.

If Yosef had been able to press "fast forward" during his years in the dungeon, he would have realized that he was there for a purpose, that this dark, dreadful period of his life was a necessary step to success and grandeur. The years spent in the dungeon were just a passing phase that brought him to the fulfillment of his mission.

Rav Druck writes that this teaches us about how to approach our own hardships in life. The darkness we endure ultimately leads us to light. If we "freeze frame" our lives, focusing only on the difficulties we now endure, we will fall into despair and feel hopeless and miserable. But we have to trust that if we could "fast forward," if we could look into the future, we would see that our current travails will bring us to happiness and success. Nothing happens by chance. Everything in our lives is by design, orchestrated for us by Hashem, for the purpose of fulfilling His plan for us and for the world.

Rav Druck cites in the context the *pasuk* in *Tehillim* (147:8) - *הַמִּכְסֶה שְׁמֵיִם בְּעֵבִים הַמַּכְבִּין לָאָרֶץ מַטָּר* (He covers the heavens with clouds, He prepares rain for the earth.) The thick storm clouds darken the skies and prevent us from seeing Hashem. The world seems dreary and gloomy. But the dark, ominous clouds bring blessed rainfall that produce food from the ground that sustains us. The dark periods are temporary, and bring us what we need, and to where we need to go.

This is a lesson we learn from the story of Yosef - to believe even when we find ourselves in the "dungeon," beset by problems and hardships, that our condition is only temporary, and that the darkness of night will ultimately give way to the bright light of daytime.

## SENDING AWAY NEGATIVE SPEECH

### Rabbi Efrem Goldberg

*"So Pharaoh sent and summoned Yosef, and they rushed him from the pit..." (41:14)*

Upon hearing the cupbearer's recommendation, Pharaoh immediately called for Yosef to be brought before him - *וַיַּלְחַדְפֵּרְעָה וַיִּקְרָא אֶת יוֹסֵף* (41:14).

The Imrei Chaim of Vizhnitz interprets this *pasuk* as an allusion to the importance of ridding ourselves of improper speech. The name פָּרָעָה can be read as פָּה - "evil mouth." The phrase וַיַּלְחַדְפֵּרְעָה, then, alludes to the need to "send away" evil speech of all kinds - gossip, angry outbursts, arrogance, gloating, vulgarity, and all other forbidden words. When we succeed in eliminating such speech from our mouths, the Imrei Chaim writes, then וַיִּקְרָא אֶת יוֹסֵף - we "summon" the *kedusha* of Yosef, we bring upon ourselves his spiritual greatness.

If we seek to grow in *kedusha*, and become more spiritual and G-dly people, this process begins with exercising care and discretion in the way we interact with other people. The first step toward attaining the *kedusha* of Yosef is to speak in the refined, humble, dignified manner that the Torah demands, and "sending away" all forms of forbidden speech.

## POISED AND PRESENTABLE

### Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

*"So Pharaoh sent and summoned Yosef, and they rushed him from the pit. He shaved his hair and changed his clothes, and he came to Pharaoh..." (41:14)*

When Pharaoh cannot find a satisfactory interpretation of his dreams, he is told of Yosef and asks for him. We read that the guards rush Yosef from prison and that he is shaved and changed before appearing before Pharaoh (41:14). It seems his retrieval from prison was harried, but he took his time getting ready. Why the discrepancy?

Rav Shimshon Raphael Hirsch notes that it is the discrepancy between what the guards force Yosef to do and what he actually does that demonstrates Yosef's character. Yosef respected himself, prioritizing being dignified and respectable in his presentation. Even while he was rushed, he was sure to arrive before Pharaoh, poised and ready for the next stage of his life to unfold. Perhaps it was this poise that enabled Yosef, and will enable us, too, to tackle all of life's challenges.

## RELEASING OUR SPARK

### Rabbi Alexander Zusia Friedman

*"So Pharaoh sent and summoned Yosef, and they rushed him from the pit. He shaved his hair and changed his clothes, and he came to Pharaoh..." (41:14)*

It is of profound symbolic significance that Yosef was released from prison on Rosh Hashanah. In every Jew there is a spark of honesty and righteousness that is never extinguished. Concerning this the Sages say (Megillah 6): "A completely righteous person will never be swallowed up," meaning that the evil inclination will never be able to destroy this spark of decency. However, that spark, the "righteous Yosef" within us, is locked up all year long, imprisoned by the body's powers and appetites. Only on Rosh Hashanah, when Jews cast aside their earthly desires and accept the sovereignty of the Kingdom of Heaven, does our spark of righteousness emerge from its prison and stand revealed in all its glory.

## WARDROBE CHANGE

### Lubavitcher Rebbe

*"So Pharaoh sent and summoned Yosef, and they rushed him from the pit. He shaved his hair and changed his clothes, and he came to Pharaoh..." (41:14)*

Yosef sensed that G-d was about to elevate him to a position of leadership, and understood that managing a vast empire would require him to immerse himself in mundane matters.

Acutely aware of how this could threaten his ability to remain spiritually focused, Yosef planned to remain detached from the culture and values of Egypt in order not to disrupt his attachment to G-d.

As a preparation, he changed his clothes not only physically but spiritually. He made it clear that he considered his new role as a "garment," something that would remain external to him, just as a garment remains external to a person. His new role would only affect him outwardly; it would not change his inner self.

Similarly, we can remain impervious to any potential spiritual damage that might result from involvement in the mundane world by viewing this involvement as a mere "garment" that can be set aside as easily as it is donned. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 35, p. 180) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

## DOMINATING MATERIALISM

### Lubavitcher Rebbe

*"So Pharaoh sent and summoned Yosef, and they rushed him from the pit..." (41:14)*

The Torah speaks of the upper realm, the Divine or spiritual world, and alludes to the lower realm, the materialistic world. The entire *parsha* speaks about the release of Yosef from prison. The name "Yosef" means "to increase," namely, the unbounded potential for growth. This growth we find in the soul, "the actual part of G-d from above." (Tanya, Ch. 2)

The prison in which Yosef was held refers to the body, and to the material existence as a whole. These tend to confine the power of the soul and deny its expression. Although G-d gave us the Torah, the Torah is also affected by the limits of material life, and the G-dly source is not always evident.

The Jew was sent into this world to reveal G-dliness. The material nature of worldly existence may initially restrict the Jewish nature; however, the constraints are temporary. Just as Yosef became the ruler of Egypt, every Jew should become a source of influence showing how the potential of the soul can overcome complete materialistic dominance.

## RECONCILING INCONSISTENCIES

### Lubavitcher Rebbe

*"Pharaoh said to Yosef, 'I dreamt a dream, but there is no one who could interpret it. Now I heard it said of you that you hear a dream to interpret it.'" (41:15)*

The dreams of Yosef and Pharaoh led to the Jewish people's exile in Egypt. Exile was caused by dreams because exile itself is like a dream. In dreams, conflicting and contradictory situations can coexist. Similarly, our behavior in exile seems hypocritical: selflessness and selfishness coexist almost simultaneously.

Living this spiritually inconsistent life is potentially frustrating. We may think that we are being dishonest with ourselves. Considering all our faults, we may feel that our connection to G-d is not real, that our efforts to advance spiritually are ultimately futile.

The connection between exile and dreams teaches us that although our actions may seem hypocritical at times, we should not become disheartened. We must strive to live as consistently as possible, not giving up because of momentary lapses.

The effects of misdeeds last only until we repair their damage through repentance. The effects of our good deeds, in contrast, last forever. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 1, pp. 85-87) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

## WITHHOLDING INFORMATION

### Kli Yakar

*"Pharaoh said to Yosef, 'I dreamt a dream, but there is no one who could interpret it. Now I heard it said of you that you hear a dream to interpret it.'" (41:15)*

Why didn't he say, "but there was none among them who could interpret it for me," as in the original account of Pharaoh's dream where we read (*pasuk 8*) "but there was none who could interpret them to Pharaoh"?

Because it seemed to Pharaoh that the necromancers had arrived at some sort of interpretation that they did not seem inclined to communicate to him. The necromancers interpreted Pharaoh's dreams in terms of events in Pharaoh's personal life rather than in terms of developments in his country. Thus, according to the Midrash, one of them said that Pharaoh would have seven daughters and bury all seven, and another said that seven provinces would rise against him in rebellion. However, they were afraid to reveal these unfavorable interpretations to the king.

Hence, Pharaoh said to Yosef: "But there was none among them who could declare it to me" aloud. They have an interpretation, but they discuss it among themselves in whispers. No one tells me anything.

## DREAM BIG

### Rabbi Moshe Schochet

*"Pharaoh said to Yosef, 'I dreamt a dream, but there is no one who could interpret it. Now I heard it said of you that you hear a dream to interpret it.'" (41:15)*

"A song of ascents: When Hashem will return the captives of Zion, we will be like dreamers." (Tehillim 126:1)

The Slonimer Rebbe (Nesivos Shalom) wonders what Dovid HaMelech is referring to when he compares the returners to Yerushalayim to dreamers.

The Slonimer Rebbe answers that the *pasuk* is referring to Yosef and his dreams, which came to fruition. Yosef understandably had many questions throughout his life as to why he had to endure so many trials and tribulations. Yet, his perspective drastically changed when he became the viceroy of Egypt. It started to become clear that the dreams which he had in his youth were becoming a reality. Upon realizing that it was all the hand of Hashem,

and that all of his troubles were for his benefit, the trajectory of his life became crystal clear.

The same will be true when Mashiach redeems us from exile. As Jews wandering through the galus, we often ask ourselves, "Why us? Why have we needed to persevere through much persecution and oppression? Why have we needed to confront the worst of what man has to offer?" Dovid HaMelech answers that just as Yosef understood his journey in retrospect, once he saw his dreams materialize, we too will be able to appreciate the plan that Hashem had for us and understand how everything that we have had to experience was for our benefit.

Let us dream big so that our dreams of *geulah* can become a reality as well!

## UTILIZING OUR TALENTS

### Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

*"Pharaoh said to Yosef, 'I dreamt a dream, but there is no one who could interpret it. Now I heard it said of you that you hear a dream to interpret it.'" (41:15)*

Hashem gave Yosef the great ability to interpret dreams. Interestingly enough, his dreams and his ability to interpret them are both the breaking point in Yosef's relationship with his brothers as well as the skill that propelled him from Pharaoh's dungeon to the throne. Thus, dreams represent both a blessing and a curse to Yosef.

Similarly, the way Yosef dealt with reuniting with his brothers also shows that there are two sides to his story. He was upset for what they did to him, and yet the Torah mentions on more than one occasion that Yosef had to leave the room to weep during his encounters with them.

R' Yoel Pinchasi shlit'a sees from here a tremendous life-lesson. Yosef HaTzaddik was given a talent - not simply as a way to amuse himself, but rather as a way to find himself. His destiny was intertwined in the meandering vagaries of dreams, and wherever those night visions took him, that was his reality. In whatever situation he found himself due to those dreams, that was what he was meant to deal with. Thus, Yosef's gift of interpreting dreams made him rich and powerful, but it was in fact his dreams that alienated him from his family.

Often we find ourselves saddled with our "peckel," our own unique and custom-tailored circumstance that tends to alternate between honorable success and/or disastrous collapse. How we deal with each individual situation is what we are put here on this world to accomplish. If we simply break down under pressure when things don't go as we think they should, we are not only admitting defeat and failure, but we are actively opposing the very tool that Hashem has given us to turn ourselves around.

Just like Yosef, Hashem has given us all "dreams" - our own personal make-it or break-it tool. Success is ours for the taking!

## PROGRESSION VS REGRESSION

### Lubavitcher Rebbe

*"Pharaoh said to Yosef, 'I dreamt a dream, but there is no one who could interpret it...'" (41:15)*

Yosef's and Pharaoh's dreams constitute a study in contrasts. Yosef dreamed about inheriting the leadership of Yaakov's family so he could further G-d's purpose to sanctify the world by transforming it into His true home. Pharaoh, in contrast, dreamed about the material welfare of the pagan empire of Egypt. Furthermore, Yosef dreamed first about earthly sheaves and then about the heavenly hosts, a progression from the earthly to the heavenly. Pharaoh dreamed first about cows and then about sheaves, a regression from a higher form of life to a lower one.

The ascent of holiness vs. the descent of unholiness expressed in Yosef and Pharaoh's dreams reflected the truth that holiness possesses intrinsic existence - it exists for its own sake and therefore is permanent - whereas unholiness is a temporary phenomenon, existing only to challenge holiness.

Although it may sometimes seem to us that unholiness has the upper hand, we must realize that, on the contrary, this is only in order to pave the way for a subsequent increase of holiness in the world. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 3, pp. 805-810, 820-822) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnfsky

## PREPARING FOR SPIRITUAL FAMINE

### Reb Noson of Breslov

*"The seven good cows are seven years, and the seven good stalks are seven years. It is one dream." (41:26)*

Both of Pharaoh's dreams involved food (the cows and cornstalks) because a person's rectification and purification come through eating. Yosef advised Pharaoh to set aside "food" (meaning spiritual food - i.e., Torah and prayer) during the good years, whenever the opportunity presented itself, in order to strengthen himself for the difficult times.

Therefore, Yosef said, "G-d has sent me ahead of you to prepare [spiritual] sustenance for you" (Bereishis 45:7) - for the tzaddik teaches us how to apply every effort to remain steadfast during years of famine and exile. (Likutey Halakhot II, p. 132)

## FEASTING DURING FAMINE

### Lubavitcher Rebbe

*"[Yosef told Pharaoh, 'In the years of famine,] all the abundance in Egypt will be forgotten." (41:30)*

Metaphorically, the years of abundance in Pharaoh's dreams allude to the years of spiritual abundance that the Jewish people enjoyed when the holy Temples stood; G-d's presence was perceivable in the miracles that occurred in the Temples.

The eras following the destruction of each Temple were spiritual "famines," when G-dliness became much less perceivable. The ravages of our long exile have made us forget how good it was when the Temples stood and when G-dliness was revealed. But, as Yosef advised, our predecessors did store up "food" by preserving the wisdom and knowledge of the Torah during the "years of plenty."

This inspiration has sustained us during our exile. As Dovid HaMelech wrote (Tehillim 119:50), "[The Torah] is my comfort in my affliction, for Your word has given me life." By studying the Torah, we can continue to thrive until the spiritual "famine" ends and G-dliness is once again revealed. (Ohr HaTorah, Bereishis, vol. 5, 975b-976a) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnfsky

## CONSIDER THE FUTURE

### Rabbi Efrem Goldberg

*"Now let Pharaoh seek out a discerning and wise man and set him over the land of Egypt. Let Pharaoh proceed and let him appoint overseers on the land, and he shall prepare the land of Egypt during the seven years of abundance..." (41:33-34)*

Pharaoh summoned Yosef for the purpose of interpreting his unusual dreams - one dream of seven lean cows devouring seven large cows, and another of seven lean sheaves of grain devouring seven robust sheaves. Yosef, surprisingly, does not only interpret Pharaoh's dreams, but also adds a practical recommendation for handling the situation predicted by those peculiar visions. The dreams meant that Egypt would enjoy seven years of surplus, which would then be followed by seven years of devastating famine that would erase all the surplus of the previous seven years. Yosef advised Pharaoh to appoint somebody to oversee the storage of grain during the impending seven years of plenty, in order to prepare for the drought years that would follow. Pharaoh responded by appointing Yosef to that position and naming him vizier over the kingdom.

Many commentators grappled with the question of why Yosef assumed the right to offer unsolicited advice to the king of Egypt. He was brought before Pharaoh for the specific purpose of interpreting his dreams, not to give advice about economic policy. Why did Yosef feel this was his place to advise Pharaoh without having been advised to do so?

The Lubavitcher Rebbe explained that in truth, Yosef's advice was part of the dream's interpretation. The Rebbe developed this point by noting another difficulty in this story.

The Torah tells that Pharaoh called for Yosef after first consulting with his advisors and sorcerers, none of whom could offer a satisfactory explanation of the dreams. The Rebbe raised the question of why they were unable to arrive at Yosef's interpretation. Was it so difficult for these wise men to realize that the large cows and sheaves

represented seven years of food surplus, and the seven lean cows and sheaves foresaw seven years of food shortage?

The Rebbe answered that in the minds of Pharaoh's advisors, this interpretation failed to account for an oft-overlooked detail of Pharaoh's dreams - that the fourteen cows were all standing together, and the fourteen sheaves were all standing together. Pharaoh did not just see the lean cows devouring the large cows, and the lean sheaves devouring the large sheaves. He also saw the lean cows first standing peacefully alongside the large cows, and the lean sheaves standing peacefully alongside the large sheaves. This detail led Pharaoh's advisors to reject the theory that these dreams foresaw seven years of plenty and seven years of famine. After all, years of plenty and years of deprivation are mutually exclusive; they cannot coexist. Thus, if this were the meaning of Pharaoh's dream, he would not have seen the cows and sheaves all standing together before the lean cows ate the large cows, and the lean sheaves ate the large sheaves.

Yosef, however, understood the meaning of this detail of the dreams. Pharaoh was not just being informed of seven years of surplus that would be followed by seven years of shortage. Rather, he was being shown that these sets of years need to "coexist." The future years of famine needed to "exist" already during the years of plenty. Pharaoh was being told that as the kingdom enjoyed a surplus, they must be mindful of the drought years that would follow and prepare accordingly. The seven years of famine in this sense would "coexist" with the seven years of plenty - and this is why Pharaoh saw the large and lean cows together, and the large and lean sheaves together.

This easily explains why Yosef mentioned the need to store grain during the seven surplus years. This was an integral part of the interpretation - that the seven lean years would, in a sense, be present already during the preceding years of surplus.

The lesson we might learn from this insight is that our future must always be part of our present.

In everything we do, we must foresee the implications of our decisions and our lifestyle on our future selves. We need to be mindful of how our spending habits will impact our finances later in life. We need to be mindful of how our eating and sleeping habits will impact our health later in life. We need to be mindful of how the way we raise our children will impact them, and our relationship with them, later in life.

We should imagine what would happen if we would have a conversation with our future selves, and what they would have to say about the way we act now. The future must be very much of our present, informing the decisions we make, the lifestyle we lead, and the routines that we follow.

## COMPELLED TO HELP

### Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

*"Now let Pharaoh seek out a discerning and wise man and set him over the land of Egypt..." (41:33-34)*

When Pharaoh has two puzzling dreams that neither necromancers nor sages can, according to Rashi, interpret to his satisfaction, Yosef is summoned from prison to decipher them. Yosef confidently decodes the dreams and their implications and then boldly counsels Pharaoh on the necessary actions to prepare for the impending catastrophe (41:33-37). Who asked Yosef for his suggestions, and why did he think it was appropriate to interject his ideas to the ruler of Egypt?

Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky explains that Yosef was someone who invariably sought out opportunities to help. After understanding the meaning behind Pharaoh's dreams and the abundance and famine that the dreams foreshadowed, Yosef naturally felt compelled to advise Pharaoh on adequately preparing for the tragedy that is about to befall Egypt. At the risk of appearing brazen and inappropriate, Yosef assumes responsibility for helping Pharaoh. Perhaps it is this same moxie that convinces Pharaoh to appoint and ultimately entrust Yosef with his nation's immediate future.

Yosef's eagerness to act with such presence of mind and resolve leaves us with the strong message that if G-d blesses us with gifts, we should use those gifts to help others.

## OVERCOMING SADNESS

### Reb Noson of Breslov

*"Let them collect all the food of those seven good years..." (41:35)*

Yosef was successful. He was a happy person. (Bereishis Rabbah 86:4)

Yosef represents holiness, the aspect of joy, life and vitality. In contrast to these states is death, which is experienced in a small way during sleep, as the Midrash states (Berachos 57b): "Sleep is one-sixtieth of death."

But when Yosef, the tzaddik, sleeps, he rests his mind, keeping it attached to life and joy. Therefore, Yosef merits not only true dreams, but even to understand the dreams of others.

Pharaoh's dream foresaw a long famine (i.e., exile), since the scrawny cows swallowed up the healthy cows, decreasing prosperity and leading to sadness and depression. But Yosef, a "man of spirit," was always joyous, and thus was able to bring happiness and overcome the effects of sadness with the idea of stockpiling Egypt's surplus. (Likutey Halakhot II, p. 155a)

## WISELY DISCERNING

### Rabbi Alexander Zusia Friedman

*“Will we find someone like this, a man in whom there is the spirit of G-d?... Since G-d has let you know all this, there is no one as discerning and wise as you!” (41:38-39)*

Apparently, even Pharaoh understood that someone who is filled with fear and knowledge of G-d must also be “discerning and wise,” and an excellent diplomat.

## INCOMPARABLE WISDOM

### Baal Shem Tov

*“Pharaoh told his servants, ‘Will we find someone like this, a man in whom there is the spirit of G-d?’” (41:38)*

According to our Sages, Pharaoh declared to his officers, “If we were to go around and seek, would we find anyone like him?” In other words: We may discover other individuals with extraordinary intellectual capabilities, but how would we ever know for certain whether they are like him?

In order to properly evaluate an individual’s wisdom and understanding, a person of superior wisdom is required to conduct the testing. The Egyptians recognized that no one in their own ranks of wise men and scholars was greater in wisdom and understanding than Yosef. It would therefore be impossible - even if they were to discover another extremely wise individual - to compare that other genius with Yosef, because they were incapable of conducting a test to compare Yosef with another candidate.

## PLAN OF ACTION

### Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

*“Since G-d has let you know all this, there is no one as discerning and wise as you!” (41:39)*

When Pharaoh finally finds a satisfactory interpretation of his dreams, he proclaims that the interpreter, Yosef, is the most understanding and wise person (41:39). Yosef credits his interpretation as coming from G-d (41:16), so why does Pharaoh see fit to credit Yosef directly?

Rabbi Berel Wein explains that Yosef trained himself to turn visions into reality, such that Pharaoh’s dreams required action, a coupling that no one else considered. It was this emphasis on devising and executing a plan of action that prompted Pharaoh to declare Yosef the wisest and most understanding.

Throughout our lives, we encounter hopes and dreams, both our own and those of others. Turning ideas into practical plans of action not only substantiates those dreams and goals but turns them into reality. Discovering how the weekly *parashah* is personal and relevant to our lives not only proves the Torah’s value but also solidifies our commitment to a plan of action that will help us become wiser and better people.

## LIMITED GREATNESS

### Reb Noson of Breslov

*“Only by the throne will I outrank you.” (41:40)*

I will be called the king. (Rashi)

The tzaddik always strives to attain great spiritual heights. However, he must constantly remember that G-d is always greater than he and that there are spiritual realms that are still beyond him.

Thus, “I (G-d) will be called the King” - a person must strive for greatness, but always remember that there is a limit to how far he can go. (Likutey Halakhot II, p. 310)

## BOUNTIFUL PRAYERS

### Rebbe Nachman

*“You will be in charge of my house, and all my people will be fed by your command.” (41:40)*

“House” refers to the fear of G-d (cf. Shabbos 31b). Al pikha (by your command) literally means “in accordance with your mouth” and refers to prayer. “All my people will be fed” indicates great bounty. Thus, when a G-d-fearing person prays, he brings bounty to the world.

## INTELLIGENT FLEXIBILITY

### Reb Noson of Breslov

*“He had him ride in his second royal chariot and they called before him, ‘Avreikh!’ He appointed him over the entire land of Egypt.” (41:43)*

*Avreikh* (אַבְרַיְךְ) is a composite of the words *Av* (אָבִ, fatherly) and *Rakh* (רָחִ, young). Though Yosef was young, he was wise. (Rashi)

*Rakh* also translates as “soft” and “bending.” Despite one’s level of wisdom and intelligence, he should know how to “bend” before others when implementing his will. Thus, we find that when Dovid HaMelech was anointed, he said (II Shmuel 3:39), “Today, I am *rakh* but anointed as king.” One must learn to be pliable, as our Sages teach (Taanis 20a): “Man must always be *rakh* (flexible) like a reed and not unbending like a cedar tree.”

## DANCING FOR JOY

### Rebbe Nachman

*“And Pharaoh said to Yosef, ‘I am Pharaoh, but without you no man will lift his hand or his foot in the entire land of Egypt.’” (41:44)*

The tzaddik is the heart of the people.

When an individual rejoices in his own heart, it causes him to elevate his hands and feet and dance joyfully.

His joy causes a sympathetic resonance in the tzaddik, the heart of the people. Then the tzaddik makes the people joyous and elevates them. (See Likutey Moharan I, 10:9)

## DIVINE CALCULATIONS

### Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

*“And Pharaoh said to Yosef, ‘I am Pharaoh, but without you no man will lift his hand or his foot in the entire land of Egypt.’” (41:44)*

There is never any reason to become jealous, even when another person seems to prosper or appears more successful than us. Rav Yaakov Meir Schechter shlit'a points out that every person's life is directed by Hashem, from the root of his soul in the higher worlds down to the minutest details of this mundane one. All that happens, even the smallest occurrence, is actually part of a larger plan, either as payment for a past deed or compensation toward the future. A person cannot lift a finger in This World without some profound accounting taking place above, specifically related to his life and his actions.

In fact, the Chida, Chacham Rabbeinu Chaim Yosef Dovid Azulai zt'l, derives this fascinating lesson from the name of Pharaoh. When Pharaoh declared, “I am Pharaoh,” he was announcing that as Pharaoh, he has the ability to control his destiny and his kingdom. But, explains the Chida, the name “Pharaoh” is also a reference to all of humanity, for a human being is constantly in a state of **פְּגָעָה** - repayment, either over some past debt or toward some future tally.

For instance, a person who is successful in a particular venture may be getting repaid for some good deed he has done or for some pain that he experienced in this life or a previous lifetime. Whereas when the wicked prosper, they are merely awaiting retribution for their misdeeds in the Next World. If they do not repent, they will be appropriately punished.

On the other hand, if a person suffers in life, and especially if he takes pains to fulfill a *mitzvah*, he will eventually be repaid. Hashem does not withhold His reward from any creature. To Him, everything is just and clear.

Thus, there is simply no reason to be jealous. Whatever happens, including a person's success and abilities, stems from the very root of his soul and is destined specifically for him.

## HUMBLE DISCOVERY

### Sefas Emes

*“And Pharaoh called Yosef’s name Zaphenath-Paneah, and he gave him as a wife Asenath...” (41:45)*

Zaphenath-Paneah - explainer of hidden things. (Rashi)

If *zaphenath* means “hidden things” and *paneah* means “explainer,” shouldn’t the name read Paneah-Zaphenath?

The name is given in what seems the reverse order to show why Yosef was found worthy to be able to discern hidden things; namely, that Yosef was exceedingly humble and kept his deeds of righteousness concealed so that they did not become immodestly conspicuous.

*Zaphenath* - It is because he conceals (his) deeds of righteousness, *Paneah* - that he is able to discover and explain hidden things.

## HUMBLE HARVESTING

### Lubavitcher Rebbe

*“And he [Yosef] gathered all the grain of the seven years that the land of Egypt was enjoying and stored the grain in the cities...” (41:48)*

In order to preserve the grain that he had gathered, Yosef stored it together with some of the soil in which it had grown (see Rashi). Spiritually, the “food” that nourishes us is our knowledge of the Torah. Humility is the lowly “soil” that we mix with our knowledge in order to preserve it.

We can cultivate humility as we amass knowledge of the Torah by recalling that the Torah is the wisdom of the infinite G-d; therefore, no matter how much we learn, we have not even scratched the surface. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 25, pp. 224-226) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnfsky

## PROGRESSING BY REMEMBERING

### Lubavitcher Rebbe

*“Yosef named his firstborn Menashe... he named his second son Ephraim.” (41:51-52)*

Living in exile requires us to use two apparently contradictory approaches toward the world at large: On the one hand, we must be constantly on guard against harmful influences; on the other hand, we must engage the outside world in order to influence it positively.

Clearly, influencing our environment is a greater accomplishment than merely maintaining our values. Nonetheless, maintaining our values must be taken care of first, for if we forget our roots we will no longer have anything to contribute to the world.

The two sons of Yosef, born and raised in Egypt, personified these two aspects of life in exile:

Yosef named his firstborn Menashe (meaning “[Exile] causes one to forget”) in order not to forget his family and heritage. Yosef named his second son Ephraim (“he will be fruitful”) in order to emphasize that our purpose in the world is to influence it positively. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 15, pp. 432) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnfsky

## FOLLOW THE INSTRUCTIONS

### Lubavitcher Rebbe

*“Pharaoh said to all Egypt, ‘Go to Yosef; do whatever he tells you.’” (41:55)*

Although Yosef succeeded in refining Egypt somewhat by having the Egyptians circumcised, he was acting on his own initiative. Therefore, despite his good intentions, his plan backfired.

By becoming more refined, Egypt was made worthier of receiving Divine beneficence, and receiving this beneficence strengthened it. Unfortunately, Egypt was not refined enough to use this power properly, eventually using it instead to persecute the Jewish people. (Pri Eitz Chayim, Sha'ar Chag HaMatzot 7)

Similarly, we too must be careful not to overreach or compromise the Torah's rules in our efforts to do good, because no lasting good can come out of compromising the Torah's laws. The same G-d who created the world gave us the Torah, His Divine instructions for how to live in it. Only by following the Torah's rules will our efforts to help others be crowned with ultimate success. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 1, pp. 98-102) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

## **THERE'S ALWAYS HOPE**

### **Reb Noson of Breslov**

*"Yaakov saw that there were provisions in Egypt..." (42:1)*

The word *Shever* (שבר, provisions) literally means "break"; it can also be read as *Seiver* (שבר, hope). Thus, the Midrash (Bereishis Rabbah 91:1) states: "Yaakov saw *shever* - a famine; he saw *seiver* - the plentitude of their harvest. Yaakov saw *shever* - Yosef descended to Egypt; he saw *seiver* - Yosef was the ruler. Yaakov saw *shever* - the Jews would be enslaved there; he saw *seiver* - the Jews would be redeemed from there."

Yaakov, the paradigm of a Jew, understands that there is always hope, that a person must always await salvation. Whenever one feels closed in, embattled from without and troubled from within, he must look inward, at the level he is on at that moment. He will then see that despite the *shever*, he has *seiver*, and can draw strength from the knowledge that all will be rectified. (Likutey Halakhot V, p. 143a)

## **REMAINING INCONSPICUOUS**

### **Rabbi Efrem Goldberg**

*"Yaakov saw that there were provisions in Egypt, and he said to his sons, 'Why do you keep looking at one another?'" (42:1)*

Due to the harsh famine conditions in Eretz Yisrael, Yaakov sent his sons to Egypt to purchase grain. He turned to his sons and said, *למה תראו* - literally, "Why should you be conspicuous?" (42:1).

Rashi, based on the Gemara, explains: *למה תראו עצמכם* - *בפני בני י Ishmael and Eisav as though you are satiated?"* At that point, Rashi writes, Yaakov's family still had food, but the people around them did not. Rather than stand out by appearing comfortable and well-fed, Yaakov felt that the family should go procure food from Egypt like the other people in the region.

Rav Shmuel Berenbaum, in Tiferes Shmuel, notes the lesson that Yaakov here is teaching us - to live inconspicuously, without putting our good fortune on display. When we enjoy blessings, we must be very sensitive to the people around us who do not share those blessings and avoid arousing their jealousy.

A certain friend of mine, who, Baruch Hashem, has enjoyed great financial success, was once walking with another friend, when they met someone else they knew whom they had not seen in a while. This person asked my friend how he was doing.

*"I heard you were starting a business - how is it going?"*

My friend said, "Baruch Hashem, it's going ok, but you know, the economy is down now, everyone is hurting."

Later in their walk, the other friend turned to him and asked why he answered this way. He was doing very well and making a lot of money. Why did he make it sound like he was having a hard time?

My friend answered, "Do you think he wanted to hear how well I was doing? Do you think he wanted to hear that I had become wealthy? This would have made him feel upset, because he's not doing that well."

This is the lesson Yaakov was teaching is sons, and us - *למה תראו*. We are certainly entitled, and encouraged, to enjoy the blessings that G-d has bestowed upon us, but while exercising care not to put our successes on display before those who have not been given those same blessings.

## **IMPROVING TOGETHER**

### **Rabbi Shlomo Ressler**

*"So Yosef's brothers - ten [of them] - went down to buy grain from Egypt... The sons of Israel came to buy provisions among those arriving..." (42:3-5)*

As the famine spreads across Egypt and the surrounding lands, Yaakov instructs his sons to travel to Egypt to buy some grain (42:2). The next *pasuk* goes on to tell us that, in fact, Yosef's ten brothers head down to Egypt (42:3) and that the "sons of Israel" are among those that make the journey from Canaan (42:5). Why did the *pasuk* initially refer to Yaakov's sons as "Yosef's brothers," and then, just two *pesukim* later, refer to them as "sons of Israel"?

Malbim and other commentaries teach that Yaakov's sons depart for Egypt as Yosef's brothers, with the intent to split up and search for Yosef. This benevolence demonstrates the brothers' remorse for their previous actions as well as their camaraderie in working together toward a common goal. These two factors render them "*Bnei Yisrael*," the first such description of the brothers in the Torah. Learning from the past to improve the future is the key to becoming a great people, a significant step we first witness here, and a valuable teaching that continues to pay dividends in all of our strivings.

## LIVING MODESTLY

### Rabbi Efrem Goldberg

*"So Yosef's brothers - ten [of them] - went down to buy grain from Egypt... The sons of Israel came to buy provisions among those arriving..." (42:3-5)*

The Torah describes Yaakov's sons as arriving in Egypt to purchase grain - בתוכם הבאים - literally, "in the middle of those arriving." It appears that the Torah seeks to emphasize the brothers' positioning themselves amongst the other people who had come to purchase grain in Egypt, the only country that had stored grain in preparation for the seven years of famine.

Rashi explains: מטמינים עצם שלא יכירום - Yaakov's sons concealed themselves among the crowds of people who had come to Egypt. Yaakov had instructed them not to come together, as a group, in order to avoid the עין הרע ("evil eye"), as they were all good-looking and strong.

Rav Shmuel Berenbaum, in *Tiferes Shmuel*, offers several reasons why it was important for Yaakov's sons to scatter, and not be seen together as a group.

One explanation is that this was a time of crisis, when people faced hunger and deprivation, a period when the מידת הדין - Hashem's attribute of strict justice - prevailed. During a period of דין, Rav Berenbaum writes, it is crucial for a person to integrate into the *klal*, into the public, rather than isolate himself. When we are being judged strictly, we are not likely to earn a favorable judgment if we are assessed as individuals. Our best chances of being judged favorably is to blend into the community, or the society, so we are judged as part of the whole.

Thus, for example, as Rav Berenbaum writes, when Rav Eliezer Yehuda Finkel was the Rosh Yeshiva of the Mir Yeshiva, he refused to receive the honor of an aliyah on Rosh Hashanah. On this day of דין, when everyone is being judged, Rav Eliezer Yehuda did not want to stand out, he did not want to be accorded any special distinction, because he wanted to secure a favorable judgment through his integration as part of the *klal*, without standing out.

More generally, Rav Berenbaum writes, Yaakov's instruction to his sons' models for us the ideal of הצנע לבת (Micha 6:4) - "walking humbly before G-d." The Jewish value of *tznius* is not limited to skirt lengths and necklines. It is a far broader concept, that we are not supposed to try to "turn heads," to draw attention to ourselves, to stand out, to receive recognition.

Our wish must be to just blend in, to be part of the crowd, like Yaakov's sons. Our goal in life must be to bring glory and honor to Hashem, not to ourselves. Life is not about fame and prestige, about gaining recognition. We are to live humbly, with *tznius*, without seeking to draw attention to ourselves.

## BREAKING MATERIALISM

### Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev

*"And Yosef was the governor over the land; it was he who sold grain to all the people of the land." (42:6)*

There are "people of G-d" and "people of the land." The "people of G-d" are the righteous. The "people of the land" are those who are attached to earthliness, and who therefore need to be "broken."

This idea is alluded to by the term for "who sold grain" (משביר), which is related to the term "to break" (שבר). Meaning, Yosef would break the "people of the land," those who needed to be elevated in order to be called "people of G-d." Thus, *משביר* is rooted in the word, to break them, so that they can be called "people of G-d."

## BREAKING BAD HABITS

### Rabbi Efrem Goldberg

*"And Yosef was the governor over the land; it was he who sold grain to all the people of the land." (42:6)*

Rav Naftali of Ropshitz, in *Zera Kodesh*, offers a deep interpretation of the word *משביר* with which the Torah here describes Yosef.

This word is derived from the root שבר - "break." The *Zera Kodesh* thus explains that Yosef was the שולט על הארץ, he attained his stature of leadership and prominence, because he was the *משביר* - he "broke" his evil inclination, overcoming temptation.

As a seventeen-year-old slave, alone in Egypt without any family, without any positive influences, he was tested by Potifar's wife, who desired an intimate relationship with him. She relentlessly seduced Yosef, but Yosef "broke" his natural desires and passions, and resisted. It was in this merit, the *Zera Kodesh* writes, that Yosef earned the position of prestige to which he eventually rose in Egypt.

The *Zera Kodesh* explains that Hashem wants to shower us with blessing, with prosperity and good fortune, but the "pipes" are "clogged." Something stands in the way of the bountiful blessings that are constantly being sent down to us from the heavens, and so they don't reach us. The way to "break" that obstruction is to "break" our bad habits, our sinful impulses, our negative tendencies.

We must restrain the natural drive to look at what we're not supposed to look at, to engage in behaviors that we're not supposed to engage in, and to overindulge in physical and material delights rather than exercise moderation for the sake of spiritual advancement.

When a person becomes a *משביר*, somebody who "breaks" his sinful nature, who restrains his negative instincts, then he becomes worthy of the great blessings that Hashem wishes to bestow upon us.

## RULING WITH KINDNESS

### Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev

*“And Yosef was the governor over the land; it was he who sold grain to all the people of the land.” (42:6)*

The righteous Yosef, whose very name (יַעֲזֵב) now indicates that his only desire was to increase (לְהַזְּבִּין) goodness for the Jewish people, “was the ruler over the land.”

He was therefore granted dominion over this world. The same is true for all those who wish to benefit the Jewish people.

Evildoers, by contrast, who desire to worsen the situation of the Jews, and who cringe when they see the Jewish people flourish, forfeit dominion.

## LEADING BY EXAMPLE

### Shach al HaTorah

*“And Yosef was the governor over the land; it was he who sold grain to all the people of the land.” (42:6)*

Although Yosef was governor of Egypt, he did not delegate the distribution of the produce to subordinate officials but supervised all the sales personally.

He did this to make sure that no one would be cheated and to provide an example of how to practice the virtue of compassion in order to save people from starvation.

## SPARING THEM EMBARRASSMENT

### Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev

*“[Yosef’s brothers] came and bowed down to him with their faces to the ground. And Yosef saw his brothers and he knew them, but he made himself a stranger to them...” (42:6-7)*

Defeat usually comes as an immense grief to the loser. Thus, Yosef knew how humiliated his brothers would be if they learned that the lord before whom they were bowing “with their faces to the ground” was Yosef, whom they had ridiculed when he had revealed to them his dream that they would all bow to him someday. Yosef did not make himself known to them immediately in order to spare them this humiliation.

The Torah relates this fact in praise of the righteous Yosef. Someone else in Yosef’s position would have taken full advantage of this opportunity to have his revenge, to force his enemy to truly feel his defeat.

Yosef, however, did the opposite. When his brothers bowed to him, he immediately recognized them, but he made himself a stranger in order to spare them the shame of defeat.

## HUMBLE UNITY

### Mishmeres Itmar

*“He [Yosef] said to them, ‘From where do you come?’...They said to him, ‘We are the sons of one man; we are truthful; your servants have never been spies.’” (42:7,10)*

Yosef noticed that there was unity among the brothers, but he detected a sense of arrogance and was disappointed. For that he scolded them and asked them why they were so arrogant: “Don’t you know where you come from?” The brothers answered, “We are the sons of one father. That is why we are united, and your servants are not spies but servants of G-d.”

## ALL FOR THEIR GOOD

### Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

*“And Yosef saw his brothers and he knew them, but he made himself a stranger to them and spoke harshly to them...” (42:7)*

First, Yosef accuses his brothers of being spies. Then, he allows them to return to their father but not before slipping their money back into their sacks, to make it look as if they hadn’t paid for their provisions. Then, when they come back to pay and bring their youngest brother Binyamin to stand before the ruler, Yosef plants his royal goblet in Binyamin’s saddlebag and later detains him for “stealing” his precious vessel. Was this a game? Was Yosef purposely teasing his brothers as a means to exact revenge against them for what they had done to him? What, indeed, were Yosef’s intentions?

R’ Alter Yitzchak Weinberger zt’l (Beis Yitzchak) answers based on the Gemara (Eruvin 65b): “With three things is a person’s (character) determined; by his cup (intoxication), by his pocket (money dealings), and by his anger (temper).” Being away from his family, Yosef was acutely aware of the reputation that the sons of Yaakov maintained. They were known as people who would sell their own flesh and blood for a few coins just to rid themselves of an adversary. This bothered him and as part of his ultimate revelation as Yosef, viceroy of Egypt, he decided to build up his family name in the process.

Thus, he put their money back into their bags knowing full well that they would make every effort to return it. This would make a great impression on the Egyptians who could not believe that any person would not just simply “take the money and run.” This denotes their “pocket.” Planting the royal goblet was intentional, since this depicted their “cup”; drinking with the ruler without becoming drunk or unruly. The fact that through it all they never lost their temper was an indication of their “anger.”

Yosef’s “game” was only a way to repair his family’s reputation.

## UNRECOGNIZABLE TRANSFORMATION

### Lubavitcher Rebbe

*"Yosef recognized his brothers, but they did not recognize him..."* (42:8)

Yosef's brothers did not believe that it is possible to be immersed in the mundane world without being affected by it. This is why they, like the patriarchs before them, chose to be shepherds: shepherds spend most of their time far from the fast-paced bustle of urban society, and can devote most of their time to calm contemplation of spiritual matters.

Thus, Yosef's brothers could not even remotely imagine that the person standing before them, the viceroy of this vast commercial and pagan empire, might be their brother - whom they knew, despite all the faults that they suspected him of having, to be spiritual in outlook and righteous in behavior.

Yosef's greater Divine consciousness, however, enabled him to remain loyal to his ideals while involved in the mundane world.

Similarly, by following Yosef's example - summoning the Divine consciousness necessary to withstand the tests of secular society - we can transform ourselves "unrecognizably," into versions of ourselves that we could previously not have imagined. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 3, p. 832; See Torat Moshe (Alshich) Bereishis 45:4) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

## TEACHING MOMENT

### Maharam of Amshinov

*"On the third day Yosef said to them, 'Do this, and live, for I fear G-d...'"* (42:18)

It was not in the nature of Yosef to boast of his being G-d-fearing. However, his intention was to convey this attitude to his brothers, hoping to bring them to repentance. Therefore, he said, "I fear G-d," and they responded, "Indeed, we are guilty concerning our brother" (Bereishis 42:21).

## TAKING PRIDE

### Reb Pinchas Horowitz

*"On the third day Yosef said to them, 'Do this, and live, for I fear G-d...'"* (42:18)

Knowing of his brother's humility, R' Pinchas was astonished that R' Shmelke said that he was proud that he had reached the status of being G-d-fearing. However, we learn from the Torah that one should be proud to be G-d-fearing.

Yosef was proud to proclaim that "I fear G-d." For the performance of a *mitzvah*, one needs Divine help, so one cannot be proud because it is not entirely his action.

But to attain the status of being G-d-fearing, we are told (Berachos 32b), "All is in the hands of Heaven except the fear of Heaven."

Heaven does not help in this instance, for the person must work by himself to attain that level. If he worked and reached that level, he can be proud.

## CONSTANT PRESENCE

### Radamsker Rebbe

*"If you are honest men, let one of your brothers remain imprisoned... and you go bring the provisions for the hunger of your household."* (42:19)

This shows the kindness of the Almighty. He remains and does not depart from His people even if they are on a low level, for He dwells in the inner depths of their hearts.

The *pasuk* tells us that wherever we are, the Almighty is in the hidden mode, as it states (Devarim 31:17), "I will hide My face from them." When you go to the marketplace for your needs, remember that Hashem is in the inner depths of your heart.

## CHANGE IS POSSIBLE

### Rabbi Jeremy Finn

*"Then bring your youngest brother to me so your words will be verified, and you will not die. And they did so."* (42:20)

After accusing the brothers of being spies, Yosef insists that they bring Binyamin down to Egypt to corroborate their pleas of innocence.

Rav Shimon Schwab asks why it is necessary for the *pasuk* to end by saying, "וַיַּעֲשׂוּ כֵּן - And they did so." A few *pesukim* later, the Torah tells us that the brothers returned home to bring Binyamin, so why does the Torah need to say *וַיַּעֲשׂוּ כֵּן*; we know that they did it?

Rav Schwab suggests that at this stage, even though Yosef had accused them of being spies, when faced with their protests of innocence, he was willing to re-examine his position and to entertain the notion that he was wrong. Therefore, he sent them to bring Binyamin.

וַיַּעֲשׂוּ כֵּן tells us that the brothers were so impressed that the viceroy of Egypt could entertain the notion that perhaps he was wrong that *וַיַּעֲשׂוּ כֵּן*; they too began to entertain such thoughts.

Perhaps, despite all the years of justifying their actions against Yosef, they also had made a mistake. The brothers had one opinion for twenty-two years, namely, that their actions toward Yosef were justified and that they were blameless. After twenty-two years, they begin to re-evaluate and arrived at a different conclusion.

The lesson is that we need to continually evaluate and reassess our long-held positions and attitudes on so many topics.

We need to ensure that what we hold to be true and correct and the way that we behave and conduct ourselves is in fact true and correct. (L'titecha Elyon, p. 347)

On the theme of changing attitudes, Rabbi Isaac Bernstein highlights a meaningful change that we witness in connection with Yosef's behavior. At the beginning of *Parashas Vayeishev*, Yosef is busy with dreams, as a result of which he ends up at the bottom of a pit. At the beginning of this *parashah*, Yosef is once again dealing with dreams. This time, as a result of those dreams, Yosef is elevated to viceroy over all of Egypt.

What is the difference between these two events involving dreams that caused such radically different results?

Rabbi Bernstein answers that at the beginning of *Parashas Vayeishev*, Yosef is busy telling everyone about what his dreams meant for the future. If you go around just talking about your dreams, then the inevitable result is that others will dislike you - to the point that they would throw you into a pit.

*Parashas Mikeitz* begins with Yosef interpreting Pharaoh's dreams. So, if you no longer focus on *your* dreams, but instead help other people and assist them in realizing *their* dreams, then instead of languishing at the bottom of a pit, it will elevate you to enjoy spiritual summits.

## LACKING COMPASSION

### Sforno

*"They then said to one another, 'Indeed we are guilty concerning our brother inasmuch as we saw his heartfelt anguish when he pleaded with us and we did not listen; that is why this anguish has come upon us.'"* (42:21)

True, we did not commit a sin by selling Yosef because that was his rightful due, but when he begged us to have compassion on him we should have had mercy on him, and we failed to do so.

## COMFORTING OUR SOUL

### Lubavitcher Rebbe

*"They then said to one another, 'Indeed we are guilty concerning our brother inasmuch as we saw his heartfelt anguish when he pleaded with us and we did not listen; that is why this anguish has come upon us.'"* (42:21)

During its life in the body, the Divine soul's consciousness is constricted by the body's mundane perspective. The soul's mission in life is to refine both the body and the world at large. Fulfilling this mission enables the soul to ascend in the afterlife to a spiritual level higher than the one on which it existed prior to its life in this world. Consequently, as long as we remain true to the purpose of life, the soul is happy to endure the spiritual "pain" of existing inside a body. When, however, we ignore our Divine mission, the soul suffers needlessly.

Allegorically, our indifference to our soul's pain is comparable to Yosef's brothers ignoring his pleas to rescue him from the pit. Conversely, when we listen to our soul's plea, we alleviate its pain and hasten the advent of the final and ultimate Redemption. (Sefer HaMa'amarim Melukat, vol. 5, pp. 261-262) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnfsky

## SMALL ACTIONS, BIG IMPACT

### Rabbi Jeremy Finn

*"They then said to one another, 'Indeed we are guilty concerning our brother...'"* (42:21)

The story of Chanukah rests on the Chashmona'im finding one jar of oil that was still intact with the seal of the Kohen Gadol. They lit from the oil in this flask, and instead of lasting for one night, it shone for eight nights.

This famous flask with the seal has gone down in history. Every year, we retell its story. The question we need to ask is why the flask was sealed with the seal of the Kohen Gadol in the first place. Where in the Mishnah or the Gemara does it say that the oil in the Beis HaMikdash must be sealed with the seal of the Kohen Gadol?

The Shabbos shel Mi suggests that the reason the miracle occurred was because a certain Kohen Gadol performed his personal service in a manner that was above and beyond that which was required.

A Kohen Gadol is required to bring a personal *Korban Minchah* daily, which included oil as one of its ingredients. Although this only requires regular-grade oil, out of his love for this *mitzvah*, this particular Kohen Gadol used only extra-pure olive oil, and to differentiate his special oil from the regular oil, he placed it in unique jars to which he affixed his personal seal.

This is the jar that was found by the Chashmona'im and became famous in perpetuity.

This shows the importance of small acts and the effect that they can have. This Kohen Gadol performed an innocent act; the seal was merely a way of identifying his oil and differentiating it from the others, and yet it changed Jewish history and led to Chanukah.

We can never be aware of the full impact of our actions. Simple, trivial acts can have ramifications for generations. We have to be sure to act positively so that, as far as possible, we can ensure that our actions help perfect and bring optimism to the world and make a positive impact for generations to come. (Inside Chanukah, p. 177)

The Chafetz Chaim has a similar insight on *Parashas Mikeitz* regarding the power of words and their ramifications.

Not knowing that his beloved Rachel had stolen her father's idols, Yaakov Avinu says (31:32): *עִם אֲשֶׁר תִּמְצָה אֶת אֱלֹהִיךְ לֹא יִחְיָה* - With whomever you find your gods, he shall not live," the consequence of which is Rachel's death. His words had come back to haunt him.

Therefore, when faced with a seemingly cruel and cunning adversary in Egypt, Yaakov Avinu does not fall into the same trap again. He does not curse this viceroy, but instead blesses his sons that they should be granted mercy by Hashem: “וְאֶל-שְׁדֵי יִתְהַלֵּם רְחִמָּם לִפְנֵי הָאִישׁ” - And [Hashem] will give you mercy before the man” (43:14).

The benefits of such an approach are obvious: Had he cursed the viceroy with death, it would have led to the death of his own son, Yosef!

From the story of the flask of oil on Chanukah, we see the effect of positive acts, and from the way that Yaakov Avinu speaks regarding the viceroy in Egypt, we learn the power of and need for positive words.

## **CORRESPONDING JUDGEMENT**

### **Reb Aryeh Leib of Plotzk**

*“Therefore, this distress has come upon us.” (42:22)*

This punishment is retaliation in kind. We wanted to murder Yosef because we knew that he would be the ancestor of the sinful Yeravam ben Nevat (King of Israel), and we judged him by his descendants. Now we, too, are being judged by our descendants. Because our descendants will be spies in the wilderness, we are accused of being spies ourselves.

## **ADMITTING OUR WRONGS**

### **Lubavitcher Rebbe**

*“Reuven responded to them, saying, ‘Did I not tell you, ‘Do not sin against the boy, but you would not listen? And now we are being called to account for his blood.’” (42:22)*

Reuven’s words to his brothers seem harsh, but he was in fact trying to ensure that they were repenting fully.

In order to repent truly, we must “own” the wrong for which we are repenting. As long as we have some excuse to justify our behavior, or think that other factors contributed to our poor choice, even if we admit our guilt we have not truly repented. Rather, we have to recognize that - knowingly, deliberately, and with complete freedom of choice - we chose to turn our backs on G-d. Even if external factors did influence us to sin, we are still responsible for having knowingly and deliberately chosen to sin, for we can always ignore such influences.

Once we own up to our deeds, we can truly regret them and resolve not to repeat them. This cleanses us of our past, liberating us to forge ahead with our lives with renewed innocence, joy, and optimism. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 30, pp. 198) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnepsky

## **COURAGEOUS CONVICTION**

### **Rabbi Shlomo Ressler**

*“And Yisrael said, ‘Why have you harmed me by telling the man that you have another brother?’” (43:6)*

As Yosef’s ten brothers arrive in Egypt, Yosef recognizes them. Wanting to see Binyamin, Yosef insists that they must bring him down as proof that they are not spies. The brothers leave Shimon behind as a prisoner and depart for Canaan to inform their father of Yosef’s requirement that they return with Binyamin.

Though Yaakov initially forbids them from meeting this condition, as the hunger worsens, Yaakov asks his sons to return to Egypt to acquire more food. The brothers then remind Yaakov of Yosef’s ultimatum: They must bring Binyamin with them. The Torah relays a peculiar *pasuk*: “And Yisrael said, ‘Why have you harmed me by telling the man that you have another brother?’” (43:6).

Why is Yaakov questioning their words now rather than when they first returned? Also, why is Yaakov suddenly called Yisrael?

Rav Shimshon Raphael Hirsch explains that as long as Yaakov is worried about the prospect of sending Binyamin, he becomes apocalyptic and distressed. However, once Yehudah reassures his father of their safe arrival to Egypt, Yaakov’s faith in G-d kicks in, and he is able to act as Yisrael - the leader of the future Jewish nation. Yisrael is able to move forward once he accepts Yehudah’s guarantees that Binyamin will not be harmed.

Sometimes we are paralyzed by fear, thereby stunting our potential. Resolving to act despite our fears, as Yaakov boldly does, enables us to act courageously, with conviction, and in full acceptance of G-d’s help.

## **MELODY OF THE LAND**

### **Rebbe Nachman**

*“Take from the famous products of the Land in your vessels and bring a gift down to the man...” (43:11)*

*Zimras ha’aretz* (famous products of the Land) can also be translated as “melody of the Land.” Every place has its own melody. Furthermore, every level of vegetation - each blade of grass - has its own melody which extends its blessing throughout the world. (See Likutey Moharan II, 63)

## **MERCY TO THE MERCIFUL**

### **Imrei Shefer**

*“May G-d Almighty grant you mercy before the man [Yosef]...” (43:14)*

According to the Sages (Shabbos 151), people who have pity on others will find that Heaven will have pity on them in turn.

Yaakov said to his sons: May G-d put mercy into your hearts so that you may have mercy on others, “before the man,” even before G-d will cause the man to have mercy on you. This will ensure the release of your other brother and of Binyamin, for if you yourselves will have mercy on others, you, in turn, will receive mercy from Heaven.

## THE NEED FOR PRAYER

### Rabbi Efrem Goldberg

*"May G-d Almighty grant you mercy before the man [Yosef]..." (43:14)*

Yosef's brothers came to Egypt to purchase grain, and they stood before the Egyptian vizier, not realizing that he was in fact Yosef, whom they had sold as a slave many years earlier. Yosef instructed them to return to Canaan and bring back the youngest brother, Binyamin, and he held Shimon prisoner in Egypt to ensure they would return. Yaakov at first refused to allow Binyamin to travel to Egypt, but eventually, when the family ran out of food, he relented.

Before the brothers left for Egypt, Yaakov gave them extra money, as well as some small items to bring with them as a gift of appeasement for Yosef. He then offered a prayer for them: *וְקַل שְׁדִי יְתַנוּ לְכֶם רַחֲמִים לִפְנֵי הָאִישׁ* - asking that Hashem should ensure they are treated mercifully by the man in charge (Yosef).

Rashi writes: *מעתה אינכם חסרים כלום אלא תפילה, הריני מתפלל עלייכם* - "Now, you are missing nothing besides prayer, so here, I am praying for you." After Yaakov equipped them with money and a gift for Yosef, all that was left to do was to daven that Hashem would take care of them make everything work out.

Rav Yerucham Levovitz writes that we learn from Rashi's comments about the indispensability of *tefila*. Of course, we need to exert effort, to put in our *hishtadlus*, to take all necessary measures to care for ourselves and meet our needs. But once we've put in a reasonable effort, we still need to daven. Without *tefila*, our work and effort will not succeed.

I often enlist the analogy of a winning lottery ticket. Even though a person has the winning ticket, he will not receive a penny if he does not present it to the lottery officials. There is something he needs to do to receive the money.

The same is true of *davening*. Hashem is ready to shower us with blessing, but we need to "present the ticket," we need to turn to him in prayer. As hard as we work for what we need and what we want, the *brachah* will not come without the missing ingredient - *tefila*.

Rav Shlomo Wolbe taught this concept in regard to parenting. As parents, we invest an enormous amount of effort into our children. We care for all their needs, work to support them, pay their tuition, and do what we can to help them grow and develop properly.

All this work, of course, is vitally important. But it is not enough in the absence of *tefila*. Parents have the obligation to pray for their children's wellbeing and success.

This is a crucial element of parents' responsibility for their children. Even with all the work and effort we invest on behalf of our children, we must never neglect our obligation to daven for them with all our hearts, as much as we can.

## NATURAL MIRACLES

### Lubavitcher Rebbe

*"May G-d Almighty grant you mercy before the man [Yosef]..." (43:14)*

Conventional wisdom has it that prayer is necessary only in desperate situations. Thus, Yaakov's sons assumed that since Yosef was detaining their brother because he suspected them of being thieves or spies, it would be enough to pacify him with a gift.

From Yaakov's words to his children, however, we learn that even when a favorable outcome seems perfectly natural, we should never assume that we can reach it without Divine assistance. We must always pray - and not as a secondary measure, but as the primary measure.

Although we must create natural channels to facilitate G-d's blessings, we should realize that G-d, who is beyond nature, controls every aspect of our lives. When we realize this fully, we will indeed perceive that the "natural" occurrences of our lives are all in fact miracles garbed in nature. - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

## SPARING NO EXPENSE

### Lubavitcher Rebbe

*"[Yosef] said to the overseer of his household, 'Have animals slaughtered and prepared, for these men will dine with me.'" (43:16)*

Hospitality requires that hosts try their best to care for all their guests' needs. Even if they are not sure that the guests will partake of what is prepared for them, the hosts should nevertheless provide abundantly for them.

Similarly, although living frugally is a value found in the Torah, it is one we should impose on ourselves, not on others. When we think about providing for a poor family, for example, we should not provide them with only their bare necessities, but with enough to allow them to live according to a dignified standard of living. (Sichot Kodesh 5728, vol. 1, p. 322) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

## THINKING OF OTHERS

### Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

*"Because of the money replaced in our saddlebags earlier are we being brought, to bring a charge against us, and to cast [libel] down upon us, and to take us as slaves, along with our donkeys!" (43:18)*

As Yosef's brothers arrive with Binyamin to secure food for their family, they are ushered into the palace to dine with Yosef. Fearing the worst, the brothers think they are being detained "on account of the money that came back in our sacks originally [on their first trip], and we are brought to be attacked and imprisoned, including our donkeys" (43:18). While their fears of being arrested for a crime they did not commit are understandable, why would they worry about their donkeys at a time like this?

The Ramban provides valuable insight into the brothers' thought process. Yosef's brothers feared that detaining their donkeys would prevent them from sending food to their families back home. Their concern for others was on par with their self-interest, and that is an honorable character trait that provides the right foundation upon which to build a thoughtful Jewish nation.

## DESCENDING AND ASCENDING

### Lubavitcher Rebbe

*"[Yosef's brothers said,] 'We originally came down - yes, we came down - to buy food.'" (43:20)*

These two expressions of descent prophetically allude to the two stages of the Jewish people's spiritual descent into Egypt. The Land of Israel is watered by rain, which falls sporadically and inconsistently. Therefore, living in the Land of Israel is conducive to making its inhabitants pray for rain, recognizing that their sustenance depends upon G-d (Bereishis Rabbah 13:9). In contrast, Egypt is watered by the Nile's consistent, annual overflow. Living in Egypt therefore makes its inhabitants more likely to see the forces of nature as their provider, rather than G-d. Thus, leaving the Land of Israel to live in Egypt was Yaakov's family's first spiritual descent. Nonetheless, since Yosef sustained Egypt miraculously - always ascribing his success to G-d - the Divine concealment that characterized Egypt was temporarily lessened during his lifetime.

After Yosef died, Egypt's true character reasserted itself. The Jewish people then underwent a second, further spiritual descent. G-d promised Yaakov that these two descents would be countered by two ascents, saying, "I will... bring you up, yes, bring you up from there" (Bereishis 46:4).

The first ascent occurred with the Exodus from Egypt; the second will occur with the Messianic Redemption. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 6, pp. 28-32; see Torah Ohr 49a) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnfsky

## YEARNING AND RESTRAINT

### Lubavitcher Rebbe

*"He raised his eyes and saw his brother Binyamin, his mother's son, and said, 'Is this your youngest brother of whom you spoke to me?' And then he said, 'May G-d be kind to you, my son.'" (43:29)*

When he was first reunited with his brother Binyamin, after many years, Yosef expressed both intense emotion and emotional restraint. This was because Yosef knew that a proper balance between emotional yearning and emotional restraint is part of holy living.

On the one hand, we are called upon to experience an intense emotional desire to cleave to G-d and escape the bonds of physical reality.

On the other hand, we must restrain this emotion and remain grounded in this world in order to fulfill the Divine mission we have been entrusted with.

The way we live out this paradox is by devoting specific times to each extreme. Our emotional yearning takes place primarily during prayer, when we feel a fiery love for G-d. Following prayer, we should invest these emotions into studying the Torah, Divine wisdom as it has been garbed in the physical realm. Studying the Torah, in turn, inspires us to fulfill G-d's commandments and do other acts of kindness, all of which "grounds" Divinity in this world. This involvement in materiality then fuels our next flight into Divine ecstasy during prayer. - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnfsky

## WEEPING FOR THE GENERATIONS

### Tiferes Shlomo

*"Yosef hurried because his compassion was deeply moved toward his brother... and he entered his room and wept there... and he controlled himself and said: 'Serve bread.'" (43:30-31)*

Yosef symbolizes the righteous of future generations who would be compassionately moved for the Jews because of their long and arduous exile that appears to continue without end.

*"And he entered into his room and wept": He forced his way into G-d's secret chambers and wept.*

But there he learned that the time had not yet come for redemption, hence "he controlled himself," for he was not permitted to hasten the end of the exile.

*"And he said, 'Serve bread)": He prayed that whatever their fate, the Jews might be given bread at least, a modest living, so that they would be able to endure the sufferings of their long exile.*

## HINDSIGHT IS 20/20

### Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

*"With the first light of morning, and the men were sent, them with their donkeys. They left the city; they had not gone far..." (44:3-4).*

After feasting with Yosef and spending the night, the brothers head home the following morning. The *pasuk* describes their departure: "With the first light of morning, and the men were sent, them with their donkeys. They left the city, didn't go far..." (44:3-4). Why is the *pasuk* worded in such an awkward manner?

Rabbeinu Bachya points out that the first letters of the Hebrew words that mean "them (ה) and their donkeys (ו), they (ה) left (ו)," spell the name of G-d backward. While the brothers are about to encounter tension as Yosef accuses them of stealing from him, looking back at this event later, they will come to understand that G-d was always in control and the event occurred for a reason.

The same lesson can be applied to our lives - hindsight reveals that things happened for a reason, a fact that would serve us well if we could have that level of trust in real time.

## FREED FROM ENVY

### Kav Chein

*“And portions were taken to [the brothers] from before him, but Binyamin’s portion was five times as much as any of theirs. And they drank and were merry with him.”* (43:34)

From the day they had sold Yosef they had not drunk wine... but on that day they drank wine. (Rashi)

They still did not know that the Egyptian lord before them was their brother Yosef. Therefore, Yosef was still lost to them. Why, then, would they have drunk wine on that day?

They saw that Binyamin had received larger portions of food than they, and yet they were not jealous of him. Hence, they realized that they had rid themselves of the sin of envy which had led them to sell Yosef into slavery (as the verse [Bereishis 37:11] states, “and his brothers envied him...”), and consequently they felt that they could drink wine again.

## IMPLANTING LOVE

### Lubavitcher Rebbe

*“[Yosef said,] ‘Put my goblet - the silver goblet - at the top of the pack of the youngest one [Binyamin]...’”* (44:2)

Yosef knew that the Jewish people would be in exile for a long time, and that not all of them would possess the same level of Divine consciousness that enabled him to thrive in Egypt. Yosef therefore sought a way of protecting them from Egyptian depravity, ensuring that they would eventually leave Egypt and receive the Torah. Yosef realized that what they needed was a love for G-d powerful enough to overcome the materialism of Egypt.

Yosef’s silver goblet alludes to this love, for the word for “silver” (*kesef*) is related to the word for “yearning” (*kisuf*). Yosef further knew that not-yet-fully-righteous people cannot spark such a love by themselves, so he implanted this love in them by “implanting” it within Binyamin. (Likutei Torah 3:90; Ma’amarei Admur HaEmtzai, Bereishis, pp. 291; Ohr HaTorah, Bereishis, vol. 2, 341a; ibid., vol. 6, 1103b) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnfsky

## PURIFYING KINDNESS

### Rebbe Nachman

*“Morning dawned and the men and their donkeys were sent on their way.”* (44:3)

“Morning” corresponds to Avraham, who is associated with the *sefirah* of *Chesed* (Kindness). With the appearance of Divine kindness, people are able to leave behind their evil traits, evil speech, and base material desires. (See Likutey Moharan I, 38:4)

## OUT-SNAKING THE SNAKE

### Lubavitcher Rebbe

*“After all, this is that from which my master drinks, and he uses it for divination. What you have done is an evil thing!”* (44:5)

The words for “uses for divination” (נחש ינוחש) are related to the word for “snake” (נחש). This phrase can thus mean that Yosef uses his goblet to “out-snake the snake.”

The snake is associated with trickery (see Bereishis 3:1); the nature of a trick is to conceal reality. The idolatry of Egypt sought to conceal the truth of G-d’s existence and involvement with the world.

Yosef was able to reveal Divinity in Egypt by maintaining his love for G-d. By hiding his goblet, which alluded to this love of G-d, in Binyamin’s sack, Yosef was planting this love in his brothers’ consciousness. It follows that through our “goblet,” our deep, joyous love for G-d, we, like Yosef, can neutralize the world’s concealment of Divinity - we can “out-snake the snake.” (Ma’amarei Admor HaEmtzai, Bereishis, p. 297; Ohr HaTorah, Bereishis, vol. 2, 341a; ibid., vol. 6, 1104b-1105a) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnfsky

## MESSAGE RECEIVED

### Lubavitcher Rebbe

*“[Yosef’s brothers said,] ‘It would be a disgrace for us, your servants, to do such a thing...’”* (44:7)

Spiritually sensitive people regard their misdeeds as indications of what aspects of their spiritual life they need to work on. Aware that everything happens by Divine providence, they even regard being falsely accused of doing some misdeed as a Divine sign that there is some flaw in their spiritual life. Thus, the fact that Yosef’s brothers were found with something that did not belong to them - even if it was deliberately planted - was meant to inform them that they were spiritually lacking in some way.

We see from this that the true, inner purpose of everything that happens to us is to refocus us properly. By developing our spiritual sensitivity this way, we can hasten the advent of our own redemption, along with the redemption of the whole world. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 15, pp. 359-363) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnfsky

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