

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

“**A**nd it was, at the end of two years, [that] Paro (Pharaoh) dreamed” (Beraishis 41:1). Being that Yosef was sold when he was 17 years old and imprisoned one year later, and he was 30 when Paro pulled him out of prison to interpret his dreams, this two-year sentence can not refer to how long Yosef was in prison, but to how long after he had interpreted his fellow inmates dreams he was called upon to do the same for Paro. Originally, Yosef was supposed to be in prison for 10 years, one year for each brother he had spoken poorly about (see Shemos Rabbah 7:1). Instead, because he asked Paro's butler to mention his plight directly to the king in order to regain his freedom—rather than trusting G-d to take him out (see Rashi on 40:23), two more years were added as a punishment.

Being that we are not supposed to rely on miracles, what was Yosef supposed to do? Squander the opportunity of a “natural” means of getting out of prison? It's like that famous joke about a town that is flooded; when all the townspeople are evacuated, this one “believer” stays put, trusting that G-d will save him. When the water reaches the second floor of his home, a rescuer in a boat tries to convince him to hop aboard, but he refuses, saying that G-d will save him. When he is forced to stand on the roof of his home to avoid drowning and a ladder is lowered from a helicopter hovering above his house, with the pilot begging him to climb up, he again refuses, insisting that G-d will save him. After he drowns, he confronts G-d by asking why He didn't save him. G-d responds by telling him that He tried, but when He sent the warning to evacuate it was ignored. Then He sent a boat, and when that was refused, He sent a helicopter. The problem wasn't trusting G-d, it was not recognizing that G-d helps us through natural means (with rare exceptions). Yosef is languishing in prison, and he sees that in three short days someone he had helped will have access to the king. What did Yosef do wrong by asking the butler to

mention his plight to the king? Should he have thought that for most people this would be an opportunity sent by G-d, but I, “I am Yosef the tzaddik,” and I deserve a more obvious means of being helped? How could Yosef have been punished for putting in the “hishtadlus,” the effort needed to have things come about through natural means, by asking the butler to remember him?

This difficulty becomes even greater when we consider the wording of some of the Midrashim. As the Be'er Basadeh (40:23) points out, the Tanchuma (Vayaishev 9) says that two years were added because Yosef “tossed away his trust in G-d and trusted in the chief butler.” This seems to imply more than just putting in the effort rather than sitting back and letting G-d do it all.

Several years ago (see www.aishdas.org/ta/5766/miketz.pdf), I suggested that Yosef's mistake was not realizing that G-d's plan was not to give him access to the king's ear, but to give him the reputation as the premier dream interpreter. After all, it wasn't only the butler's dream that he interpreted, but the baker's as well, even though the baker would be dead in the same three days. G-d wanted Paro to call upon Yosef to interpret his dreams, which would set the stage for becoming the viceroy. Instead, Yosef is asking the butler to help him get out of prison, whereby he would be a “free slave.” It is possible that had there been no dreams to interpret, Yosef asking the butler to help would not have been problematic. However, if G-d was already working on getting him out via his G-d given dream-interpreting skills, how could Yosef try getting out a different way? On his level, Yosef should have realized that the butler being able to ask the king to free him was not what G-d had in mind.

“He declared an ending for the darkness” (Iyov 28:3). Beraishis Rabbah (89:1) says that this refers to the “end” of the two additional years that Yosef spent in prison. Once the “end” of the punishment had arrived, immediately “and Paro dreamed,” leading to his release. Rabbi Yechiel Michal Feinstein, zt”l, asks why this punishment would be different from any other punishment, that it required a special “end point” to be set. Whenever there is a punishment, it matches the sin it was sent for, with a precise beginning and ending. The “end” is determined by the severity of the sin, without having to put another “expiration date” on it. Why do Chazal need to darshen (expound upon) a

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pasuk (verse) to show that Yosef's punishment also had an "end by" date, if having a precise ending is inherent in all punishments?

Rabbi Feinstein answers by differentiating between types of punishments. There are punishments sent as specific retribution for a sin, and these punishments will therefore match the sin exactly, including having a specific starting and ending point. There are other times where the punishment is being abandoned by G-d, losing the connection with Him, thus allowing for things to happen that G-d will not protect us from. [The Malbim and the Raibag use this concept to explain how the nation suffered casualties in the war following Achan's taking from the spoils of Yericho. Even though only Achan had sinned, it caused G-d's divine presence to leave the nation, leaving them vulnerable to losses.] Rabbi Feinstein says that Yosef, because he asked the butler to speak to the king for him, was punished by losing his divine connection for two years. The Midrash is teaching us that even when the punishment is "abandonment," a limit is set as to how long the period of being abandoned is (depending on the severity of the sin). Once the "end" of the "darkness" was reached, "Paro dreamed," leading to Yosef's release. (This would seem to be true in a case where being abandoned is the prescribed punishment for a particular sin, as with Yosef, who "abandoned" G-d when he put his trust in the butler instead. Being "abandoned" implies having been connected and losing that connection. However, one must first work on building that connection, which can also be lost by losing focus on the Creator.)

This may explain what Yosef had done wrong as well. While in prison, "G-d was with Yosef" (Beraishis 39:21), so much so that everyone recognized it, and Yosef was put in charge. He had been in prison for 10 long years, without an end in sight. Was G-d still with him? Yosef may have been wondering whether he had done something wrong that had caused G-d to abandon him. Although he was doing his best to become reattached to G-d (even though in reality he still was), he saw an opportunity to get out even in his "state of abandonment," so he asked the butler to speak to the king. As a result of his acting as if he was in a state of abandonment, G-d

punished him by actually abandoning him (for two years).

Had Yosef asked the butler to help him knowing that it was only "hishtadlus," putting his trust completely in G-d while "going through the motions" of accomplishing things naturally, perhaps he would not have been punished. However, because he thought he had been abandoned, and was seeking a way out while in a state of abandonment, he may have thought that the butler could actually accomplish something. And because Yosef "tossed away his trust in G-d, and trusted in the chief butler" instead, he was punished.

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RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

Is there a concept of separate of Synagogue and State or at least Synagogue and Politics, in the Biblical tradition? When the Israelites were in their infancy as a nation, a distinction existed between the figures of Moses and Aaron, Moses the chief judge and executive officer and Aaron the High Priest of the Sanctuary.

These two pillars remained at the heart of Jewish life throughout the ages: Indeed, the very institution of a priesthood separate from the 'executive authority' over Israel guaranteed an independent moral and ethical voice, a protection against a potential ruler with a gleam of megalomania in his eyes.

The very fact that the King was not privileged to participate in the very central Temple service helped to make him aware of the boundaries of his own power. The division between the offices served to protect the integrity of each, creating a system of checks and balances; in time, the prophet stood together with the High Priest as a charismatic spokesman of the Divine message, beholden neither to family lineage or bureaucratic office.

Hanukkah celebrates the victory of the Hasmoneans over the Greek Syrians, and so significant was this victory, so central to the survival of the Jewish religion, that even though the Hasmonean dynasty deteriorated over the generations - themselves turning into the very Hellenists that their ancestors had fought - this decline didn't prevent their inclusion in the permanent pantheon of Jewish greats.

The Hasmoneans started out as a priestly family, which makes it understandable why Mattathias, the founder of the dynasty, and his five sons, would be the revolutionary vanguard in toppling the Greek powers who had defiled the Holy Temple and destroyed it. But in the wake of their military victory, Judah Aristobulus, the grandchild of Judah Maccabee, made himself king as well as high priest, which could be described as the beginning of the end.

What strikes us about the introductory paragraph of Maimonides' Laws of Hanukkah (Ch.3, 1)

is that after describing the history of the period during the Second Temple when the Greeks ruled over Israel, Maimonides effectively praises the Hasmoneans, "...for the Hasmonean family of high priests were victorious, in which they slew the Greek Syrians and rescued Israel from their hands, and they established a king from their priests, and the kingship was restored to Israel for a period of more than 200 years - until the destruction of the Second Temple."

Although the Hasmoneans virtually disappeared at the end of 200 years, nothing in Maimonides' overview suggests a negative judgment on his part, despite their having taken the Kingship along the High Priesthood.

Maimonides' position seems to contradict a verse at the end of Genesis when Jacob blesses Judah, "The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet..."(Gen.49:10). From this verse it certainly seems that the blessing of Kingship is exclusive to the tribe of Judah - and separate from the Levite Priests. Maimonides explains that the verse doesn't forbid the choice of a king from a tribe other than Judah. After all, Saul was from Benjamin and G-d gave his imprimatur to Saul. The verse is merely telling us that once the kingship is given to the tribe of Judah it will be eternal - that then the scepter shall not leave. But on a temporary basis, kings can come from other tribes.

But Nahmanides has a different view of kingship. In his opinion the Hasmoneans were punished precisely because they merged the two institutions of monarchy and priesthood into one. True, they started out righteously; their heroic efforts literally saved Judaism from disappearing, keeping alive the Torah and its commandments. Nonetheless they were punished with the death of their progeny because of the sin of taking both the kingship and the high priesthood (Ramban on Genesis 49:10).

The Talmud itself addresses this issue when it records the following comment of Yehudah ben Gedidiah to Alexander Yannai, the Hasmonean king who ruled for 27 years: "King Yannai, let the royal crown suffice, and leave the priestly crown to the seed of Aaron," (B.T. Kedushin 66a). What the sage was saying to King Alexander Yanai strikes at the heart of the problem of the Hasmoneans' having arrogated to themselves the two pillars of Jewish leadership. How are we to understand the idea of kingship and priesthood in modern terms, given that the Jewish people have not had a king or a high priest for nearly 2000 years?

For our purposes, it would be beneficial to relate to the King as the Chief Executive of Jewish life - albeit with a profound appreciation for and hopefully even knowledge of Jewish law. The Exilarch of Babylon came from the Tribe of Judah - and so did Princes of the Sanhedrin, the Great Jewish Court (at least from

their maternal lineage). Such executive and even Judicial leadership must bear in mind the new conditions of each generation, the scientific, military, psychological and political realities and on that basis arrive at relevant decisions.

Such judgment must be "generation oriented" - for they require the acquiescence of the majority of the nation if they are to be effective. The High Priest has an altogether different function. His task is to link Jewish present to Jewish past, to bring the weight of Jewish tradition and Jewish morality to bear on Jewish government, to make certain that the present remains a bridge between Jewish past and Jewish future. Our ethics are constant and unchanging; they stand above the political necessities and even machinations of the hour. And in this sense, the Chief Rabbis of Israel - High Priests of our modern age - must remain independent from the Prime Minister and Parliament. The Rabbinic-ethical voice must be perceived as the eternal word of G-d, free of any political blandishments and concerned only in influencing by means of moral persuasion. It must be independent of political coalitions and Knesset popularity; it must be as close as possible to the voice of God.

Is this the case in Israel today? When we remember that the chief Rabbis are elected by the political Knesset, and that the political coalition parties have a major hand in choosing the judges of the chief Rabbinate High Court, politics plays a strong role in the determination of religio-legal policy. Clearly it is time for a change! © 2008 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

RABBI JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

Rarely in the Torah is a sedra break more strategically placed. Last week's sedra ends with Joseph's bid for freedom. Having correctly interpreted the chief steward's dream-that in three days he would be restored to his position-Joseph pleads with him: "When all goes well with you, remember me and show me kindness; mention me to Pharaoh and get me out of this prison. For I was forcibly carried off from the land of the Hebrews, and even here I have done nothing to deserve being put in a dungeon."

He fails to do so. The last line of last week's sedra underlines the point by repeating it: "The chief steward, however, did not remember Joseph; he forgot him."

Two years pass. Pharaoh has dreams. None of the interpretations offered by his experts satisfy him. Only then does the chief steward remember Joseph. He is taken from jail, washed, dressed and brought before Pharaoh. He interprets the dreams, proposes a solution to the problem they foretell-seven years of famine, after seven years of plenty-and is made viceroy of Egypt, second in authority only to Pharaoh himself.

Why the delay? Joseph sought his freedom and he obtained it-yet he did not obtain it because he sought it. The steward forgot. Joseph had to wait two years. Something else-Pharaoh's dreams-had to intervene. There was a break between cause and effect-emphasised by the sedra division, which means that we have to wait for a week before hearing the end of the story. Why?

Significantly, this is not the first time the Torah uses such a device in the Joseph narrative. There is an extremely enigmatic passage several chapters earlier when the brothers decide to sell Joseph:

"Then they sat down to a meal. Looking up, they saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead, their camels laden with spices, balm and myrrh to be taken to Egypt. Then Judah said to his brothers, 'What will we gain if we kill our brother and cover up his blood? Come, let's sell him to the Ishmaelites and not lay our hands on him; after all, he is our brother, our own flesh and blood.' His brothers agreed. When Midianite merchants passed by, they pulled Joseph up out of the pit and sold him for twenty shekels of silver to the Ishmaelites, who brought Joseph to Egypt."

Who pulled Joseph from the pit? Was it the brothers or the Midianites? The subject, "they," is ambiguous. The commentators offered many interpretations. Of these, the simplest is given by Rashbam.

He reads it as follows: The brothers, having thrown Joseph into the pit, sat down some distance away to eat. Reuben, sneaking back to rescue Joseph, finds it empty, and cries, "The boy is gone! Now what am I to do?" The brothers do not calm him by telling him they have sold Joseph. They are as surprised as he is. Rashbam's explanation is that the brothers, having seen the Ishmaelites in the distance, decided to sell Joseph to them, but before they had the chance to do so, a second group of travelers, the Midianites, heard Joseph's cry, saw the possibility of selling him to the Ishmaelites, and did so.

The brothers intended to sell Joseph, and Joseph was sold, but not by the brothers. They sought to do the deed, and the deed was done, but not by them.

Unusually, but of immense significance, the Torah is telling us something about Divine providence. Between intention and outcome in both cases, there was an intervention-the appearance of the Midianites in one case, Pharaoh's dreams in the other. We are being given a rare glimpse of the workings of providence in history. Nothing in the Joseph story happens by chance-and where an event most looks like chance, that is where Divine intervention is most evident in retrospect.

We are at best co-authors of our lives. Not realizing it at the time, the very act the brothers did to prevent Joseph's dreams coming true, was the first

step in their coming true. As for Joseph, unbeknown to him, his life was part of a larger story-revealed by G-d to Abraham generations earlier when He told him that his children would suffer slavery in a land not their own.

Sometimes we too catch a glimpse of the workings of fate in our lives. Many times, I have had prayers answered-but never when I expected, nor in the way I expected. In many cases, the answer came after I had given up hope. Often G-d answers our prayers. Providence exists. As Shakespeare said: "There's a divinity that shapes our ends, Rough-hew them how we will." But there is a pause, an intervention, a break in the sequence of cause and effect, as if to say: things do not happen merely because we wish them, but because they are part of the larger scheme of things.

What Joseph discovered is that, as well as initiative and enterprise, we also need patience, humility and trust. If our prayers are legitimate, G-d will answer them, but not necessarily when or how we think He will. That is the meaning of Mikketz-"at the end of two full years." We must do our part; G-d will do His. Between them there is a gap, not just in time, but in consciousness. We learn that we are not sole masters of our fate. Sometimes it is only after many years that, looking back, we see the pattern in our life, and understand how Providence has shaped our destiny. Mikketz is the space we make in our minds for the things not under our control. The name of that space is faith. © 2008 Rabbi J. Sacks & torah.org

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

We are all now witness to the fulfillment of Yosef's interpretation of Pharaoh's dreams - years of boom and bust, of surplus and famine. Yosef sees that every boom ends in a bust. That is the story of human life from time immemorial. Of course while times are good no one wishes to think that these good times will somehow end. But they always do. That is the message of Yosef to Pharaoh.

And Yosef adds the wise advice that since the years of famine that will definitely follow are a certainty one should attempt to prepare for those difficult times. It is a matter of simple logic to prepare for those hard times. The preparation for those difficult times is not only one of economic thrift and wise investment, it is also very necessarily one of mental and psychological preparation.

No matter how careful one is with one's money and no matter how one convinces one's self that money is not really that important, no one enjoys losing money and lowering one's standard of life.

Yosef is forced to take drastic economic and social actions to try and preserve the lives of the Egyptians and the people of the neighboring nations. His economic preparations, no matter how thorough

and well-planned, proved to be inadequate. Only Heavenly intervention in the person of Yaakov and his appearance and settling in Egypt served to extricate everyone from that terrible crisis. Human planning and actions always have their limitations. Heavenly aid and succor are ingredients always necessary in human affairs.

Yosef's hidden purpose was to bring his brothers down to Egypt and have them bow before him thus fulfilling literally his dream of decades ago. But the primary lesson in my opinion is that it is apparent from this whole story that Heaven is willing to turn the world upside down so to speak in order that an individual family should be united and that one person's dreams be fulfilled.

We look at world events from the viewpoint of irresistible forces and great powers. However, much of what occurs on a grand and international scale may in fact be only due to individual dreams and their fulfillment. This notion helps us to understand why the Torah places so much attention, details and demands on individual behavior.

People feel themselves small and powerless before changing circumstances and approaching difficult times. But in reality the changing times may be due to the actions, inactions, dreams and fantasies of those very people. If we truly thought that way, that my behavior affects society and its circumstances at large and is not just limited to me and my immediate circle of family, friends and acquaintances, perhaps our view of ourselves and our importance would change positively and expand.

Yosef has no doubts that the years of plenty and famine are present only to allow him to rise to power, fulfill his dreams and bring the house and family of Yaakov down to Egypt. Who knows what dreams and behavior have brought us currently to our state of trouble and depression? © 2008 Rabbi Berel Wein- Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com. For more information on these and other products visit www.rabbiwein.com/jewishhistory.

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

It is well known that on the first day of Chanukah one candle is lit. On each successive night, one more is kindled. This in fact is the view of Beit Hillel as recorded in the Talmud. (Shabbat 21b)

Beit Shammai dissents. His position is that on the first night eight candles are lit. On each successive night, one less light is kindled.

The Talmud explains the reasoning behind each view. Beit Hillel bases his view on Ma'alim Bakodesh, holiness moves in ascending order. Since

lighting the Chanukah candles is a holy act, each night requires an additional candle to be lit.

Beit Shammai sees it as corresponding to the sacrifices offered on the Sukkot festival. As they were offered on successive days in descending order, so too, the Chanukah lights. For Beit Shammai the descending order also reflects the amount of oil remaining as the miracle unfolded. On the first night there was enough oil for eight days, on the second night there was left enough for seven days until the eighth night when only the amount for that night remained.

Yet there is another way to look at this disagreement. Chanukah is a two dimensional miracle. On the one hand, we were victorious over the Syrian Greeks who were prepared to annihilate our religion. This miracle is spelled out in the Al Hanisim prayer. In it we say that on Chanukah God "gave the strong into the hands of the weak, the many into the hands of the few."

There is also the miracle of the lights. There was enough oil for one day and it miraculously lasted for eight. This miracle is alluded to in the Haneirot Halalu which is recited after the candle lighting.

In one word the Al Hanisim celebrates the physical miracle of overcoming the Syrian Greeks. The Haneirot Halalu, the spiritual miracle of retaining our belief system even in the face of powerful assimilationist forces.

Could it be that Beit Shammai and Beit Hillel disagree concerning which miracle is paramount. For Beit Shammai it was the physical military victory. Hence, the candles are lit in descending order. Such is the way of military victory. At first, it looms large, all eight candles are lit. But, while physical victory is important, if it does not lead to a meaningful message, it quickly fades and diminishes in power.

Beit Hillel is of the opposite opinion. For Beit Hillel, the miracle is spiritual. The way of spirituality is to begin modestly almost unnoticed. In time, the spiritual power expands and becomes larger and larger. Hence Beit Hillel insists the candles be lit in increasing numbers - each day the power of the spirit becomes stronger and stronger.

In Israel, soldiers display important physical power and do so with a sense of deep ethics. This is known in the Israeli Defense Forces as tihur haneshek, purity of arms. In this sense, our soldiers reflect the words of Zechariah read this week: "Not by might nor by power but by My spirit says the Lord of hosts." (Zechariah 4:6) This does not mean that might and power are not important. Indeed, some commentators understand this sentence to mean "Not only by might nor only by power, but also by my spirit says the Lord of hosts." Power and might are crucial when infused with a spirit of God.

And so it is with our holy soldiers. On this Chanukah may they all be blessed. © 2008 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and Dean of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, the Open Orthodox Rabbinical School, and Senior Rabbi of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale.

MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Yehoshua Shapira, Rosh Yeshivat Ramat Gan; Translated by Moshe Goldberg

Two Gentile kings were privileged to have a double and very special benefit: the Almighty was revealed to them in a dream with a prediction about what would happen in the future, and they had a person nearby with Divine traits who was able to explain the ambiguous dreams. The first king was Pharaoh, as is related in this week's Torah portion. The second king was Nevuchadnetzer, who dreamed about the future prominence of four kingdoms, including Greece, whose defeat we celebrate at this time of year.

Another common trait of these two kings was their harsh oppression of Yisrael, who were under their rule. It is remarkable that the Almighty is willing to treat these evil men as if they were righteous, by revealing Himself to them and foretelling the future. Why did these evil kings achieve such a high level, for which truly righteous people are required to strive so hard?

The answer to this question is that the revelations were not meant as a benefit to the evil men but rather as a way of showing us how far the light of G-d can penetrate into the depths of terror, into the very darkest corners of the exile. We can see that the very worst cases of oppression are the will of G-d. We can see that even the mightiest and most powerful Gentile kings do not have free choice but are like raw material in the hands of an artist or a strap in the hands of one who whips another person. How does this come about?

In the heart of Egypt, the most powerful kingdom in the world at the time, the great king falls asleep and has a terrifying dream. He wakes up at dawn in a cold sweat and discovers that reality has slipped away from him. Yosef is brought from prison, rises to power, and is appointed ruler over all the land... The mighty Egyptian iron fist suddenly dissolves, dissipates, as if it had only been a dream itself. A window has opened in the opaque barrier to the heavens, revealing for an instant the hand of G-d which controls history according to His will.

Generations later, Nevuchadnetzer makes an effort to see into the flames of his white hot oven, where Daniel, Chanania, Mishael, and Azaria stroll casually within the flames, as if they were on a peaceful field of grass. If his heart of stone is not moved by the scene, at least our own hearts will miss a beat as a result of this sight.

From within the darkest depths of the exile, Daniel declares his prophesy: "One will rise up who will overthrow the glory of the kingdom? This refers to Matityahu Ben Yochanan, who will remove the oppressive Greece from Yisrael" [Rashi, Daniel 11:20]. From within this unique revelation, Daniel was able to look far into the future and see that one holiday will remain to light up the darkness of the long exile with a small light. The light may be small, but no darkness can withstand it. It is a light of truth, such that the darkness of light will dissipate as if it were a mere dream.

If the above ideas were true in the past, they are surely true today. Many prophets predicted the darkness that we will experience at the end of days, but we can already see rays of light that are beginning to break through. "When G-d brings back those who return from Zion, we will be as dreamers" [Tehillim 126:1].

RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER

Weekly Dvar

In this week's Parsha, Miketz, we find Paroh having two dreams that none of his advisors can interpret satisfactorily. Yosef is then introduced, and he tells of the 7 years of plenty that will be followed with the 7 years of hunger. As part of the interpretation of the dreams, Yosef tells Paroh to appoint a man that is 'smart and wise' to overlook the storage of food for the hunger years. Paroh promptly appoints Yosef as that person, reasoning that Yosef has the 'spirit of G-d', and therefore is smart and wise. Paroh then gives Yosef more power than anyone in the entire country. Many of these actions need explanation.... Why would Paroh need a wise man to be in charge of storing food? Wouldn't it be enough to have an efficient person? And if it WAS important to have a 'smart and wise' person in charge, why did Paroh then choose Yosef because he had a 'spirit of G-d', when it wasn't even the requirement he was looking for? Furthermore, once he DID appoint Yosef, why was he so eager to give him SO much power?

To answer these questions, we first need to know Rav E. Lopian's insight into the 'smart and wise' requirement. He explains that although any bright person could have arranged for food to be stored, it takes a wise person to plan and implement for the future. It's that extra bit of foresight a wise person has that gives him the added push to do what he knows must be done, although the results are not immediate, or immediately apparent. With this we can now explain what Paroh saw in Yosef... Not only was Yosef wise, but he also had the 'spirit of G-d' - meaning - Not only was he wise enough to THINK of the future, but he had G-d's help in knowing HOW to do it, which is an even higher level!!

That's why Paroh was so eager to give him all that power. Paroh himself knew that he didn't have the

potential Yosef had, and it was all because Yosef had G-d's guidance. When we follow the guidelines of the Torah, we too show that we're wise enough to not only think of what the Torah wants, but use those actions to save up for our future (in the next world), which takes the spirit of G-d, and even more of a commitment. It's ironic that Paroh is the one that reminds us of how lucky we are to even have the Torah as our guide. We should all be wise enough to 'store' all the Torah study and good deeds we can, and enjoy their reward when it counts - in the future blessed. © 2008 Rabbi S. Ressler & LeLamed, Inc.

REBBITZEN HOLLY PAVLOV

Shearim

Lighting the Chanukah menorah is a mitzvah held in extraordinarily high esteem. The Rambam calls it "an extremely cherished and beloved mitzvah," and tells us that it is so important that one should beg, borrow, and even sell the shirt off his back to procure oil to light the menorah.

We sing, "Hanerot halalu kodesh hem." These candles are holy. What does this mean? G-d is essentially kadosh, and all that reveals and increases His presence in the world is kadosh. What gives the Chanukah lights this holiness? What makes them so cherished? Certainly, the miraculous jar of pure oil that burnt for eight days instead of one. Yet, according to the Ramban, there is more to it than that. The lights of Chanukah originate in a much earlier lighting.

In his commentary in the beginning of Parshat Bahalotcha, the Ramban cites a midrash used by Rashi: "When Aaron saw the dedication gifts of the Princes of Israel, he felt uneasy, because neither he nor his tribe was with them in the dedication. The Holy One, blessed be He, said to him: 'By your life, your part is of greater importance than theirs, for you will kindle and set in order the lamps.'" (Bamidbar 8:2)

The Ramban then asks why lighting the menorah was used to comfort Aaron, instead of the seemingly more weighty privileges assigned to him, like offering the incense, or the Yom Kippur service. Why would kindling the menorah supercede entering the Holy of Holies to attain repentance for the nation on Yom Kippur? The Ramban suggests that unlike his other functions which would cease when the Temple was destroyed, the kindling of the lights would continue beyond the Beit HaMikdash. It would be carried on by the sons of Aaron in the rededication of the Second Temple in the time of the Chashmonaim. It would be carried on even after the destruction of the Second Temple, wherever the Jews would be.

Kindling the lights of Chanukah is a continuation of Aaron's original lighting of the menorah, which was also miraculous. On that menorah of seven branches there was one light which was distinguished from the others. This was the westernmost lamp, the

ner tamid, the eternal lamp. All seven lamps were filled with the same amount of oil, and all were kindled in the evening. Six of the candles went out by the next morning. The kohanim would then clean the cups and prepare the menorah to be lit in the evening. The eternal lamp, however, burnt throughout the night and the following day! In the evening, the kohen would remove the still burning wick, clean the cup, fill it with oil and then light the new wicks with this still burning wick! What was the purpose of this miracle? Our sages tell us it was to serve as a testimony to all that G-d's presence resides constantly and eternally amongst us.

This was the light that Aaron lit and the light that the Chashmonaim relit. This is the Chanukah menorah that we continue to light, wherever, whenever we find ourselves. This is the light which we cherish. This is the light which is kadosh - which reveals G-d's presence amongst us - even in the darkest times and the darkest places. This is the light of Chanukah that will never be extinguished. © 2002 Rebbitzin H. Pavlov

RABBI KALMAN PACKOUZ

Shabbat Shalom

It is ironic that Hanukah is so widely observed in America, because it's not clear that Jews today would side with the Maccabees. The Jews didn't battle the Greeks for political independence and Hanukah can't be recast as an early-day version of Israel against the Arabs. Hanukah commemorates a religious war.

The Greeks were benevolent rulers, bringing civilization and progress wherever they conquered. They were ecumenical and tolerant, creating a pantheon of gods into which they accepted the deities of all their subjects. Their only demand was acculturation into the melting pot of Greek civilization and religion.

The Jewish community was divided in response to this appeal. Some believed assimilation as a positive and modernizing influence and they welcomed the release from Jewish parochialism. Led by Judah Maccabee was a small group opposed to the Greek ideal, and prepared to fight and die to preserve the exclusive worship of Judaism. (The name "Maccabee" is an acronym for the Torah verse "Who is like You amongst the gods, Almighty.")

This was no war for abstract principles of religious tolerance. It was a battle against ecumenicism fought by people to whom Torah was their life and breath. Would we have stood with the Maccabees or would we too have thought assimilation was the path of the future? Would we fight for Judaism today, prepared to die to learn Torah and to keep Shabbat?

Today we face a crisis of identity as serious as the one confronted 2,500 years ago. Will we survive this century as a religious community or merely as a flavor in the American melting pot? Hanukah calls to us to combat assimilation and to fight for our heritage.

Besides those who actively supported assimilation there were many who passively acquiesced. What is the use in opposing the force of history, they reasoned. We can't halt assimilation any more than we can stop the tides or the passage of the seasons. Who would be so foolish as to oppose the inevitable? Today, too, there is paralysis before the apparently inevitable progress of assimilation. What chance do we have of convincing our children not to intermarry? Jewish particularism is a past value swept away on the tides of liberalism. With the barriers of anti-Semitism down and the land of opportunity beckoning, the day of cohesive Jewish community seems gone. It's with resignation that we accept the spiraling intermarriage rate which spells our destruction as a people. Not so the approach of the Maccabees.

Remember the end of the story? Finally triumphant, Jews captured Jerusalem and rededicated the Temple. (The word Hanukah means dedication and refers to this act.) They found just one flask of oil but the flame which should have lasted one day burned for eight as if to testify that our determination was enhanced by some ineffable power suffusing our efforts with transcendent glow and power. Light the candles, says the holiday to us. Act vigorously, teach, reach, courageously and with determination, and God will invest our efforts with a power, a permanence, and a glow, far beyond our capacity to convey.

The Torah states: "And Pharaoh sent and he called Yosef (Joseph), and they ran with him from the prison." (Genesis: 41:14). What lesson is the Torah teaching us about life?

The Chofetz Chaim, Rabbi Yisroel Meir Kagan, points out that when the time came for Joseph's liberation, he wasn't let out of prison slowly. Rather, he was rushed out of his captivity with the greatest of speed. This is the way the Almighty brings about redemption. The moment it is the proper time, not even one second is lost. "This is how it will be with the final redemption," said the Chofetz Chaim. "As soon as the right time comes, we will immediately be delivered from our exile."

Our lesson: In every difficult life situation, realize that in just one moment the entire picture can change. Joseph had no time set for the end of his imprisonment upon which he could count on being set free. His imprisonment and freedom were not ultimately dependent on the whims of his mortal captors. Rather, the Almighty gave him a set time to remain in prison; as soon as the time was reached, Joseph was immediately saved from his plight.

This awareness can give you encouragement in difficult times. Even where you can make no change for improvement and you do not see the situation changing in the future, your liberation can still come in the next moment. Remember: The salvation of the

Almighty can come in the twinkling of an eyelash!
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RABBI SHAUL ROSENBLATT

Caring in the Dungeon

Poor old Joseph - sold into slavery by his brothers for no apparent reason other than he told them of his dreams; the target of seduction by the gorgeous wife of his Egyptian master. His reward for maintaining his values and integrity in the face of almost impossible temptation? Thrown into the deepest, darkest hole in Egypt and they threw away the key. If ever a person had a right to feel sorry for himself, it was Joseph.

Yet Joseph did not feel sorry for himself. Far from it. His primary concern was for others. In this week's Torah portion, he notices the pain of Pharaoh's baker and butler and reaches out to them.

The Talmud tells us: "Even with a sharp sword at your neck, don't give up on mercy." The standard explanation is that even when a situation looks as bleak as can be, don't give up hoping for God's mercy. Redemption can arrive in the blink of an eye.

There is another explanation of this phrase, though, which I heard from an Auschwitz survivor. She told me that she treasured this idea throughout her time in the camps. The Hebrew can be read to mean, "Even if a drawn sword is at your neck, don't give up on being merciful." Don't become so self-involved that you forget there are others around you in pain, too. When entrenched within one's problems, it's so easy to feel that you are the only person in the world with difficulties. It's easy to become so self-absorbed that you unwittingly become selfish and uncaring.

We all have problems, some of us more than others. It takes strength and courage to overcome them. But personal problems should not be an excuse to stop caring about others. Circumstances may rob you of many things, but when you stop caring about others, you voluntarily relinquish your humanity.

Joseph, even in the deepest pit in Egypt, cared about those who were with him. This special lady told me that even in Auschwitz, she made sure she cared about others, that she was merciful and loving. If there ever was a place where a sharp sword was at one's neck, it was Auschwitz. Yet she didn't forget that she was not the only one in pain.

We, who perhaps have much blunter swords at our necks, should learn from her example. Don't give up on caring. For there is nothing in this world that can take away our humanity other than our own decision.
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