

“It happened at the end of two years to the day.” (41:1)

The *Yalkut Shimoni*, cited by *Rashi* at the end of *Parashas Vayeishev*, attributes Yosef’s “extra” years of incarceration to the fact that he asked the *sar ha’mashkim*, chamberlain of the cupbearers, to remember him to Pharaoh. He stated his request to be remembered twice, which explains the two years of incarceration. *Chazal* end with a *pasuk* in *Tehillim* 40:5, “Fortunate is the man who has placed his reliance upon Hashem and has not turned to the arrogant ones.” This refers to one who does not rely on Egypt to sustain him. Incredible! On the one hand, *Chazal* consider Yosef to be the symbol of *bitachon*, faith and trust, in the Almighty. On the other hand, they criticize him and hold him in contempt because he turned to the “arrogant” Egyptian for help in securing his release from prison. How are we to understand this apparent contradiction?

Horav Baruch Mordechai Ezrachi, Shlita, explains this in the following manner: In the *Talmud Yevamos* 121b, *Chazal* cite the *pasuk* in *Tehillim* 50:3, “And his surroundings are exceedingly turbulent (*nisarah*).” They glean from here that Hashem deals strictly with those surrounding Him, even to a hairbreadth. This is derived from the relationship between the word “*nisarah*,” stormy/turbulent, and “*k’chut ha’sarah*,” like a thread of hair. We learn from here that the Almighty deals with those who are close to Him in the most strict measures. If they deviate ever so slightly, He punishes them in an uncompromising and severe manner. Nonetheless, if one were to question one of those “close ones” concerning whether he is willing to relinquish his “position” of proximity to Hashem, so that he would not have to be subject to such exacting discipline, unquestionably, he would never trade positions – even for a moment!

In fact, anyone who would even consider this clearly is not one of Hashem’s “close ones.” Why is this? Why are they inclined to live by the rule of a “hairbreadth”? The answer, explains *Horav Ezrachi*, emanates from the fact that to them it is not a hairbreadth; it is a wide gap. Their proximity to Hashem lends them a greater and more profound perspective on service to Hashem and responsibility to the *klal*, community. Yosef *Ha’tzaddik*’s relationship to Hashem dictated that he should not turn to the Egyptian for anything. To us, as individuals who are far removed from such a lofty spiritual plateau, it appears that Yosef really did nothing more than the usual *hishtadlus*, endeavor, on behalf of his freedom. Would we not have mentioned to the Egyptian, “Remember me when you go out”? It is merely a deviation of a hairbreadth. Perhaps this deviation is minute to us, but for Yosef *Ha’tzaddik* it constitutes a major departure from what is expected of him.

To have *bitachon* in Hashem is a primary component of Jewish theology. One must never give up hope for salvation. *Chazal* say, “Even if a sharp knife is resting on one’s throat, he should not despair, he should not give up hope.” For some people, every waking moment in the day is a lesson in *emunah*, belief, and *bitachon*, trust in the Almighty. They persevere amidst pain and anguish, with no prospects for a natural cure. Never does their trust in Hashem wane, never does it

falter. Everyone has his own “*pekel*,” package, of *tzaros*, troubles and misfortunes. For some, it is health related, for others, it could be a situation in *chinuch ha’banim*, raising children – educational, emotional, social, or *shidduchim*, marriage. Each person is doled out his “*pekel*” package, in accordance with his ability to manage the problem.

Klal Yisrael has undergone misfortunes that would have destroyed a lesser people. Only our trust in the Almighty has sustained us physically and spiritually throughout our ordeals. The Holocaust was a particular period of our history in which cataclysmic persecution put the *emunah* and *bitachon* of many Jews to its greatest test. Countless narratives have related the spiritual heroism of Jews, their overwhelming adherence to their faith in the face of overwhelming affliction, their trust in the Almighty against all odds.

I recently heard a story about a Jewish doctor who lived in Germany prior to World War II. He was a brilliant physician, whose fame had preceded him. For this reason, the accursed Nazis did not immediately send him to the gas chamber, but, instead, placed him in charge of the camp’s hospital. He was to treat the SS men and even those Jews who, because of their importance to the “cause,” were given medical treatment until the moment that they were no longer needed. The doctor did everything he could to help his brethren, even at times at great risk to his own existence. He was, however, not able to deal with the pain and suffering and brutal death which he witnessed the Nazis perpetrating upon his brethren.

This feeling of helplessness led to a deep depression that had severe physical side effects. He stopped eating; he lost his will to live. Soon he became a skeleton of skin and bones, waiting for the angel of death to relieve him of his misery. The Nazis did not “provide” for sick people in their concentration camps. They were immediately sent to their “final solution”.

Our doctor had a boyhood friend, a gentile with whom he had spent many years in medical school. Following their graduation, they had worked together on a number of research projects. The non-Jewish doctor was always in awe of his Jewish friend’s brilliance. Indeed, he was the doctor to whom all of the German physicians would turn if they, or a member of their family, had become ill. Over the years, this doctor had become the medical director of a large German hospital. Despite his eminence and success, he was a compassionate human being who was seriously troubled by the horrible crimes against humanity – especially the Jews – that his people were perpetrating. He was determined to do something, however minor, to help the hapless Jewish People. He decided that he was going to attempt to save one Jew, one single solitary Jew. This would be his good deed, this would be his contribution to humanity which would “cleanse” the stench of German evil from him.

He sent a letter to the Gestapo hierarchy requesting one Jewish “specimen” from the camps whom he could use for research. This way he could attempt to save a Jewish soul. The Gestapo agreed, on the condition that when his treatment of the patient was completed, he would have him returned to the camp to be killed with everyone else. He traveled to Auschwitz to look for that

unique patient whom he would save. One can only begin to imagine his joy when he found his long-lost friend interred in the infirmary of the death camp. He immediately requested from the commandant that he release this depressed, sickly patient so that he could be used for his research project.

He took his friend back to Germany and placed him in his hospital. He secured the finest nurses for him and provided him with the best medical treatment. Slowly, the doctor began to return to the world of the "living." During his treatment period, the war ended, and he was now able to leave as a free man. He was no longer a prisoner of the Nazis. He was, however, still a prisoner of his own mind. He could not reconcile himself with the questions he had regarding the catastrophe that had befallen his People. He requested that his friend please locate a Jew who had survived the concentration camps so that he could pose his questions to him.

There happened to be a survivor in the hospital, a strictly observant Jew, whose external appearance, his beard, *payos* and piercing eyes, bespoke an individual who had lived in the shadow of death and, as a result, had become a better, more spiritual person. Indeed, one could sense in talking to him that he was in the presence of a heavenly angel. When this saintly man came to visit the doctor who was recuperating, the doctor cried out, "My brother, how is it possible to continue on, to live with hope after the terrible destruction that was wrought upon us? How can we not give up hope?"

The Jew answered him saying, "What kept me going throughout the bitter war? Let me tell you. I am a *chasid* of the great *tzaddik*, *Rav Nachman Breslover*, who died as a very young man. He was stricken with tuberculosis at the young age of thirty. He suffered indescribable pain, becoming weaker every day. He would cough up blood amidst excruciating pain, but he never complained. As he was nearing his end, he convened his "*tish*," table, when the *Rebbe* and *chasidim* would sing and listen to words of *Torah*. During the "*tish*," he coughed up so much blood that he began to choke. We could see his agony and his torment. Yet, in the middle of this scene, the *Rebbe* cried out, 'Yehudim, Jews; it is forbidden to ever give up hope. Even in a situation such as mine, when all of the doctors have said it is hopeless, I do not give up hope! I still believe with my whole heart that I will continue to live.' The *Rebbe's* hope, his total trust in the Almighty, infused me with courage and hope to go on despite the challenges which I confronted." When the doctor heard these emotional words, he exclaimed, "You have consoled me!"

Let us hope that those sincere emotional words will inspire all of us.