

Then Pharaoh said to Yosef, since Hashem has informed you of all this, there can be no one so discerning and wise as you. (41:39)

Pharaoh sounds like a believer! A man whose entire life is devoted to idol-worship, who considers himself a deity, reverts to believing in Hashem's Word. His successor, the Pharaoh with whom Moshe dealt, was not as compliant. He exclaimed to Moshe, "Who is Hashem that I should listen to Him?" Indeed, all the miracles and wonders that transformed Egypt, seemed to have left no impression on him. What was the difference between these two Pharaohs? Is it possible that "Yosef's" Pharaoh was a kinder, gentler and more committed pagan than his successor?

Horav Yaakov Neiman, zl, comments that actually both Pharaohs had the same level of commitment; the situations differed. Neither pagan had a penchant for believing in Hashem. Indeed, if the situation would have been different, Yosef's Pharaoh would have shown his real personality. Imagine, Yosef declared to Pharaoh that his dream foretold incredible wealth and property for him and his country. Even though this period of abundance was to be foreshadowed by years of hunger, it would not affect Pharaoh. In fact, Pharaoh would become even wealthier during the years of famine, when everybody would turn to him for food. Pharaoh had no problem believing in such a G-d. Pharaoh wanted to believe and support a G-d that made him rich and powerful. Conversely, the Pharaoh with whom Moshe communicated did not hear such positive news. He was told to let the Jews go free, to release the slaves that had been subjected to his cruel torture. This would produce enormous monetary loss. Is it any wonder that such news did not evoke a cooperative response? The Pharaohs and their cohorts of each generation are all the same. They are supportive and committed as long as things go their way, as long as their evil way of life is positively reinforced. A Jew's *emunah*, on the other hand, is quite different. Our belief transcends the vicissitudes that have challenged us throughout history. Our faith in Hashem is indomitable. It has been tested and affirmed thousand upon thousands of times as Jews have confronted persecution, fear, sickness, and even death with the words of *Ani Maamin* - I Believe - on their lips. No, we do not believe in Hashem only when it directly benefits us.

Many stories demonstrate the faith and conviction evinced by our brothers and sisters who had been led through the valley of death during the Holocaust. There is a poignant story of a great chassidic *rebbe* who taught his *chassidim* how to sanctify Hashem's Name in preparation for their eternal reward.

The incident took place in the notorious Treblinka death camp, where the courtyard was filled with thousands of Jews about to be led to their deaths. They turned to the *Rebbe* of Gradzysk, **Horav Yisrael Shapiro, zl**, for words of comfort and inspiration. The *Rebbe* looked at the hapless Jews and spoke, "We must view ourselves as being fortunate to have been chosen to prepare the path for *Moshiach Tzidkeinu*, by sanctifying ourselves to die *Al Kiddush Hashem*. We must accept our self-sacrifice with love and joy. I command you neither to falter nor cry as you approach your

deaths. Rather, rejoice and sing the melody of *Ani Maamin*, and, like the great *Tanna*, Rabbi Akiva, let your souls expire with the words *Shema Yisrael*.”

After the *Rebbe* finished his words, the entire assembly began to sing *Ani Maamin*. With the cry of *Shema Yisrael*, they went to their deaths sanctifying Hashem’s Name. While some view this to be as a nice, moving story, it is much more than that. It demonstrates the fiber of a Jew. It shows that our belief in the Almighty remains firm even when our lot in life is tragic. That is why He chose us to be His nation.