

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. (41:34)

Yosef gave Pharaoh sound advice: Prepare during the seven years of abundance for a time in which food would be nothing more than a dream (or a nightmare). We do not focus on the periods of adversity when we are surrounded by plenty. We are unable to imagine what it means to be hungry while we are eating a succulent piece of meat. That is human nature. A *chacham*, wise person, has the vision to transcend his natural proclivity and see another time, another circumstance, when all will not be good, when every morsel of food will be considered a banquet.

The *Baalei mussar*, Ethicists, exhort us to take heed, to derive a powerful lesson from Yosef *HaTzaddik's* advice to Pharaoh. While “today” – when we are young, healthy in body and mind – we can rise from our chair/bed and take on the world physically and spiritually, we should store up our reserves. Who knows when the time will arrive – for some, with age; for others, suddenly, out of the blue – when these gifts which we take for granted will be nothing more than a dream, when even getting up from bed will be a difficult act, when cognitive interaction will be a daily challenge.

We must not take any G-d-given moment in our lives for granted. It is a Heavenly gift that, at any moment, can be put on hold, or, *chas v'shalom*, Heaven-forbid, be removed. Seize the moment; seize the opportunity; store up your gifts while you are able. It takes a perceptive person to realize, acknowledge and act. He is acutely aware that the “party” can end at any moment, and it would be prudent to eat while he can. Otherwise, he might be compelled to leave hungry. During periods of abundance, we tend to ignore the little things, the extras on the plate, because we have so much from which to choose. When the waiters are cleaning up the tables, however, we might be in the position to grab whatever is available and savor it. An individual who is in control of his inclinations is the type of person who perceives that the abundance is to be cherished and saved. He stores up whatever is available. Who knows when we will need it? We have no guarantee of tomorrow – period, and we have no assurance that what is here today will still be available tomorrow. Seize the day! Seize the moment: Maximize the moment.

The *Gaon, zl, m'Vilna* writes that when the deceased is being taken from his earthly home to the cemetery for burial, the *neshamah*, soul, endures much pain. It is during those few moments that the stark realization of the truth in its unabashed reality settles in. The deceased yearns just to return for one moment to answer, *Amen! Yehei Shmei Rabba!* Just to smile to someone and make him feel good. Just to recite a *brachah*. Alas, it is too late. It is well-known that shortly before he left this world, the *Gaon* wept because (he said) in this world, for a few pennies, one can purchase a pair of *tzitzis*, which he could wear. The reward is awesome. Once one leaves this temporary domain, however, it is all over. No more deposits. If he has invested wisely, he will enjoy the returns. If he has lived a life full of frivolity, wasting those precious minutes... oh well.

Two incongruous attitudes prevail: “Life is short. Enjoy it while you can.” as opposed to: “Every second counts. Make the most of your life.” We have no dearth of stories which underscore the value of each moment and how it should be spent. One of the most meaningful scenarios, as described by the *Kelemer Maggid* (one of early twentieth century Europe’s most inspirational speakers), is presented here with a chilling follow-up.

“A Heavenly voice declares, ‘Hashem has decided to revive the dead for half an hour.’ In other words, every *neshamah*, every loved one, those whom we knew and those who have been long gone, would all become alive for thirty minutes – no more – no less. What do people do upon hearing this startling news? They all run to the cemetery and wait anxiously for their late family members to rise from the grave and greet them.”

The ground rumbles, trembles and begins to erupt, as the deceased rise from their eternal rest for a thirty-minute visit in this world. Everyone expects them to greet their families and talk about how life has been treating the living; and to ask about new babies, milestone celebrations, etc. But this does not happen. Instead, the deceased make a mad dash to the nearest *shul*, the closest *bais hamedrash*, a *yeshivah*, a *kloiz*, anywhere that they can learn, *daven*, recite *Tehillim*. Others search the streets for opportunities to perform a *chesed*, act of lovingkindness – anything that will earn them eternal reward, anything. Each of them, with absolutely no exceptions, understands that these thirty moments are critical, that this is the only time in which they can accrue merit for *Olam Habba*, the World to Come.

During those precious thirty minutes, every second counts. They watch the clock nervously, realizing that every second is precious. The last thing they want is to return to their graves with little merit. This is the chance of a “lifetime”!

The *Maggid* looked deeply into the eyes of the members of the community who had gathered to hear him speak and said, “*Nu?* What would be so bad if we had more than a half an hour left to live? On the other hand, who is to say that we even have a half an hour? Every moment that is allotted to us by Hashem should be cherished for its value.” I write this *Erev Rosh Hashanah*, after I shared this story with a group of adults. I then posed a question which I am certain from the looks on their faces they had never thought about: “As you all prepare to *daven* on *Rosh Hashanah* for a *shanah tova*, you ask Hashem for another year of life. Did you ever ask yourself what life means? What do you plan to do with the life Hashem grants you? Do you want another year of fun? Of travel? Of prosperity? Of health? For what? What aspect of life is worthy? How do you measure worthiness? Are you prepared to devote your life to living for Hashem? To ask for life, without being cognizant of the meaning and value of life, has as much meaning as the life that we are praying for. When we realize the true value of life, we will appreciate the gift and we will be effusive in our praise of and, most important, gratitude to Hashem for granting us this gift.