

## Hashem was with Yosef, and he became a successful man... His master saw that Hashem is with him, and all that he would do Hashem would make successful in his hand. (39:2,3)

People go through life searching for success. They are seeking that unique elixir that will provide them with favorable achievement in all of their endeavors. Some are fortunate to find it; while, to others, it remains elusive. What is the key to success? Wherein does one find the passport to achievement? Yosef was successful. How did he do it? *Rashi* explains the phrase, *ki Hashem ito*, "Hashem was with him," as *Shem Shomayim shagar b'fiv*, "The Name of Heaven was fluent in his mouth," to mean that he would regularly refer to Hashem in conversation.

The *Midrash Tanchuma* elaborates on this *pasuk*: "Potifar was an immoral pagan priest. How would he 'see' G-d with Yosef? When Yosef would enter to serve Potifar, he would entreat Hashem with the following: 'Master of the world, You are my Benefactor; You are my Patron; grant me (the ability to have) grace, kindness and compassion in Your eyes and in the eyes of all who behold me, and in the eyes of Potifar.' Hearing Yosef muttering silently, Potifar became nervous: 'What is Yosef whispering? Could it be witchcraft, magical incantations?' Yosef immediately explained, 'I am praying to G-d.' Potifar saw that everything Yosef did was successful. How did he see this? Yosef would pour his master a cup of juice. 'I do not want juice; I want wine,' Potifar declared. Suddenly, the liquid became wine. He would pour cooked wine. Potifar declared, 'I want regular, uncooked wine.' The wine immediately changed into non-cooked wine. Whatever Potifar demanded, Yosef brought him. He asked for something, and Yosef was there with it. If Potifar changed his mind, the product took a 'sudden' turn and became what he desired. Thus, Potifar saw that Hashem was with Yosef."

The *Midrash Rabbah* states that Yosef praised and blessed Hashem for everything that he (Yosef) did. No activity, no endeavor, went unnoticed by Yosef. He perceived Hashem's Presence in everything that he did. He was acutely aware that whatever he achieved, he had achieved only because Hashem willed it.

Yosef's success was not simply due to his awareness of G-d, but because he articulated this awareness. *Shem Shomayim shagar b'fiv*, Hashem's Name was fluent in his mouth. Yosef kept on praying constantly. He understood that he needed Hashem every step of the way. Only Hashem could help him. Otherwise, he had nothing.

**Horav Shimshon Pincus, zl**, derives a compelling lesson from Yosef's consistent "mumbling." *Melacheish v'nichnas, melacheish v'yotzei*, "He whispered as he walked in; he whispered as he went out." Yosef's *tefillah*, supplication of Hashem, was neither a one-time arrangement, nor was it restricted to three times a day. Prayer was his life. As he breathed – he

prayed, every moment, every movement. It was all about prayer. *Tefillah* is the guiding principle and blueprint for a Jew's daily endeavor. To live with Hashem means to pray to Him. Prayer is our conversation with the Almighty: "For which a great nation that has a G-d Who is close to it, as is Hashem our G-d, whenever we call to Him" (*Devarim* 4:7). This is the *tzurah*, image, of a Jew: he lives in constant proximity with Hashem. How? Through prayer.

*Rav Pincus* explains that this is why *Matan Torah*, the Giving of the Torah, to *Klal Yisrael* is compared to a wedding, and the relationship between Hashem and His people are likened to a marriage between man and a wife. A marriage is much more than a reciprocal relationship; it is a completely new form of life, in which two people live together as one. Likewise, Hashem is with us at all times, prepared and waiting to assist in every manner – large and small. Hashem is present to listen. As the well-known story goes, the *Baal Shem Tov* was orphaned from his father when he was but a child of five years old. As his father's health worsened and he sensed that death was imminent, his father called in his young son and said, "Srulikul (Yisrael), my child, I feel the end very near, but I want you to know that you have a Father up in Heaven. Whenever you feel the need to 'talk' to Him, just do so. He will always listen."

Furthermore, *Rav Pincus* explains the *pasuk*, *ki Hashem ito*, "Hashem is with him," by describing a child who walks into a dark, dreary, lonely place, while he holds onto his father's hand. He is afraid; fear courses through his body, but as long as he holds his father's hand, his fear is allayed. Yosef prayed constantly to Hashem, because he knew that he was in a place that was treacherous. He understood that, without Hashem, he had no chance of success. He prayed. His prayer was his outstretched hand to his father in Heaven. This is how we should all live. Veritably, we have no other way.

We have no dearth of stories which underscore the efficacy of prayer. I recently came across the following story, which I feel presents an even wider dimension to prayers' profuse influence: A family was spending their vacation in Teveriah. One day, the mother and two young daughters decided to go to the beach, where there was an area for separate swimming. The father went instead to pray at the tomb of Rabbi Meir Baal Haneis.

The two girls went into the water right by the shore. Neither one knew how to swim, so they were playing it safe. Suddenly, a large wave came along and swept the older girl into the deep part of the sea. The child flayed her arms in an attempt to stay afloat. She was not successful, and she began to bob her head in and out of the water. The girl was drowning. She screamed for help to her mother, who also did not know how to swim. What does a mother do when her child is drowning before her eyes, and there is nothing she can do to save her?

The mother ran up the road and stood in the middle in an attempt to flag down a car. Perhaps someone could help save her child. A number of cars drove around her with the drivers screaming, "Get out of the way!" No one stopped to ask, "What is wrong?" One car stopped and a middle-aged man, dressed in a business suit, came out of the car and asked, "What happened?"

“My daughter is drowning! Please help! She cannot swim,” she pleaded. The man’s immediate response was to run to the water, as his wife who was driving the car screamed, “Do not forget that you are recuperating from a heart attack!” The man did not listen. He was too busy running to the water. As he ran, he removed his jacket and shirt. He ran into the water, and, in about one minute, returned with a little girl.

“That is not her!” the mother screamed. “It is my younger daughter who must have gone in to rescue her older sister. She also does not know how to swim.” The mother pointed toward a spot a few feet farther down in the sea where her daughter was last seen. The man immediately swam out to the spot, and, in a few moments, returned with the limp body of a young girl.

Meanwhile, a crowd had developed around the mother, all looking on nervously as the man bobbed in and out of the water, searching for the older girl. As he was returning to shore with the girl, one of the onlookers screamed out, “Take her head out of the water!” The rescuer was so overcome with his concern to locate the girl and bringing her to shore that he had forgotten to hold her head out of the water. He immediately flung the girl over his shoulder, and, upon reaching the shore, began CPR. It took time, but he was finally able to feel a pulse. The girl was breathing.

The rescue squad arrived, and, after checking out the girl, the grim-faced medic said that the girl had been under for too long. The mother screamed, “No! We are going to the hospital. I am not giving up on my child! Sadly, the doctor in the emergency room concurred with the medic. Only a miracle would save the girl. The mother declared, “If a miracle is what is going to take to bring my daughter back, we will pray to Hashem for a miracle.”

The family gathered together and began to pray fervently into the night. They were not giving up hope. A Jew never despairs from salvation. Nothing is beyond Hashem. The next morning, the doctor came out with incredulity written all over his face and said, “I have never seen anything like this. Your daughter is actually responding to treatment! The numbers are rising. She will make it!” She did. Two days later, the girl walked out of the hospital on her own.

It was clearly a miracle that her brain had not been deprived of oxygen the entire time that she had been submerged. The family wanted to make a *seudas hodaah*, thanksgiving feast, out of gratitude to Hashem. A feast would not be appropriate without including the rescuer who had saved her life. The problem was – they had no clue as to his identity. They returned to the hospital, where, after some research, they were able to locate his address. He lived on a *kibbutz* up north, regrettably not an observant *kibbutz*. The man was not at all acquainted with the religion of his ancestors. Nonetheless, they insisted that he be a part of the festivities.

That night, he shared the limelight with the young girl whom he had saved. He was embarrassed by all of the adulation that was directed towards him. “I did nothing,” he insisted. Whatever “nothing” he did, it was much more than what anyone else had done. Then, he began with his story.

“I was raised in a completely assimilated home. I went to all of the right secular schools. In college, I excelled as an Olympic swimmer. I became a successful lawyer. Life was good – until, one evening after a swim, I felt pain in my chest and I keeled over. I had suffered a massive heart attack. I survived, and, with physical therapy and medication, I had been in the process of nursing myself back to health. I had recently decided to return to daily swimming. My wife had discouraged me, claiming that it was too soon after the event to return to such strenuous exercise. I felt “something” within me pushing me to swim. Indeed, had I not been exercising in such a manner these last few weeks, I could never have saved your daughter.

“When I jumped into the water and retrieved a girl, I was ecstatic. I had saved the child from drowning. When I surfaced and was told that there was another one, I became very anxious. I had missed the girl who was actually drowning. I was so disconcerted that when I found the girl, I forgot to take her head out of the water. When I came home from the hospital I broke down in bitter weeping: ‘I killed that girl!’ My wife attempted to calm me – to no avail. I felt responsible for the girl.

“I returned to the beach where the incident had taken place. I climbed up on a hill overlooking the beach, and I looked up to the sky. I had never in my life prayed before that day. I had never understood the concept of prayer. I knew neither what to do nor to whom I was talking. I began my prayer, ‘Hashem, this is the first time that I am speaking. I no longer can go on living in this manner. Please ignore my past and consider it as if I have been praying to You all of my life, and apply my entreaty as a merit for the young girl that I attempted to save. Grant her life! Please!’

“I returned home and immediately called the hospital to inquire if Hashem had listened to my plea. Imagine how I felt when they informed me that your daughter had woken up exactly at the time that I was praying!”

The lesson is quite simple: He was a simple, ignorant Jew who had been assimilated all of his life. He was clueless about Judaism, and he had no idea what it meant to pray. In one instant, however, his life changed – and, instead of giving up hope, he turned to Hashem and prayed, sincerely, without fanfare, a “simple” request: “Hashem, can You provide the girl with a miracle?” We all have such moments in life. We think that we have gone too far, messed up, sinned beyond return. The *yetzer hora*, evil inclination, wants to convince us that it is too late; we have blown it; we have lost our chance. It is not true. It is never too late. Prayer can turn any situation around.