

The seven years of famine will arise after them, and all the abundance in the land of Egypt will be forgotten. (41:30)

When Yosef described the sorry state of affairs during the years of hunger, he said that the hunger would be so devastating that no one would be able to recollect the previous wonderful years of abundance. This was represented by the seven lean cows swallowing up the seven healthy cows in such a manner that the presence of the seven healthy cows would not even be a memory. They would be gone, disappeared, as if they had never existed. *Ramban* suggests that Yosef was alluding to Pharaoh that the years of famine would be no ordinary famine, where one can “put away” some food for a rainy day. No! When the famine arrived it would ravage Egypt, to the extent that no one would have anything. No savings, nothing.

Yosef explained to Pharaoh that the hunger would go against anything the Egyptian culture understood. There would be no such thing as classes of wealthy people who had preserved food for a rainy day. The Egyptians lived for the present. They had great wealth, and they enjoyed it. It never entered their minds that it would all be lost. They lived for the present, not the future. They reveled in their prosperity and enjoyed their abundance without regard for the future. The future did not affect them. Life was all about “now”!

Yosef taught the Egyptians that, in order to survive, they must alter their mindset. The seven years of famine that would follow the seven years of abundance would totally erase any semblance of abundance. If they did not prepare for it, they would all die! This is why Yosef told Pharaoh that it was crucial to appoint someone who neither possessed – nor lived by – the Egyptian conviction. It had to be someone who was: wise, who could see what the future, would bring; a visionary, who understood that the resources that existed in the present must be preserved for the future or there would be no future. A wise person does not squander his wealth and resources in times that are good. He knows that changes occur, at times without warning.

Thus, he always sets aside some surplus assets, just in case they are needed. His foolish counterpart lives for the moment, ensconced in the present, while ignoring the future. His future, if it changes negatively, will be very bleak indeed.

The greatest gift is the ability to recognize Heavenly blessing, especially when it is cloaked in the ambiguity of negative circumstances. A wise person understands that he can, and should, learn from everything that happens in his life. Nothing comes from Hashem without purpose. Nothing is happenstance. *Horav Yisrael Belsky, zl*, observes that this is where Yosef demonstrated his wisdom and uncanny ability to glean a lesson for the future from everything that had taken place in his life. As the years of plenty prepared Egypt for its upcoming years of famine and challenge, Yosef's thirteen years of pain and adversity were a vital prelude to his becoming an Egyptian monarch, second only to Pharaoh. His preceding circumstances, which included: his enslavement; the incident with Potifar's wife from whom he barely escaped spiritually unscathed; followed by his

subsequent imprisonment, were all part of a Heavenly-mandated prelude to prepare Yosef for his future role as the Egyptian viceroy, the second most powerful person in the world. It was these moments, during which his success in overcoming the challenges allowed him to prepare for the future, crystalizing his unshakeable dedication to the will of Hashem under the most trying circumstances. Yosef understood quite well the meaning of preservation, taking the moments of spiritual abundance and saving them for a time when he would shore up all of his spiritual reserves.

The *Rosh Yeshivah* explains that the ability to employ present resources to prepare them for the future is a combination of Divine and human endeavor. Hashem creates the opportunity by catalyzing events, both positive and negative, which set the stage for some future event. Yosef's suffering, Pharaoh's dream, and the years of plenty, (and we shouldn't ignore the incident between Yosef and his brothers) clearly indicate that we humans have no control over the events which occur in our lives. We are able, however, to take the circumstances and occurrences and utilize the resources that we gained from them, to use them at a later juncture.

The Egyptians thought they were smarter than Yosef. *Chazal* say that the clever Egyptians stored their surplus produce. In the end, it all became infested, compelling them to go to Yosef and plead for food. It was only Yosef's national grainaries that had no spoilage. When the Egyptians took note of this phenomenon, they began to fear Yosef, thinking that he possessed supernatural powers. According to the *Ramban*, Yosef might have had access to a substance known as *chumtun*, an effective preservative. He could mix a drop of *chumtun* into the grain, and it would be protected from worm infestation.

A Jew also has access to a preservative, a spiritual preservative. In *his Nefesh Ha'Chaim*, *Horav Chaim Volozhiner*, *zl*, compares a Jew's *yiraas Shomayim*, fear of Heaven, to a spiritual preservative. A person could learn and become erudite; he could perform *mitzvos* and, on the surface, be viewed as an observant scholarly Jew. If he does not, however, "preserve" his learning and *mitzvah* observance with *yiraas Shomayim*, it will decay and putrefy, eventually leaving him nothing more than an empty shell. Learning and *mitzvah* observance are not a way of life. They comprise life itself. In other words, *yiraas Shomayim* preserves life.