

Pharaoh said to Yosef... “There can be no one so discerning and wise as you. You shall be in charge of my palace, and by your command shall all my people be sustained.” (41:39,40)

In *Shemos* 1:8, the Torah records, “A new king arose over Egypt who did not know Yosef.” The *Talmud* (*Sotah* 11a) contains a debate between *Rav* and *Shmuel* concerning the “new” Pharaoh: Was he truly a new monarch who had now ascended to the throne? Or was he the same Pharaoh of Yosef’s time who conveniently forgot who it was that had benefited Egypt in their time of national need? If, indeed, it was the same Pharaoh whose benevolence to Yosef now donned a cloak of despotism concerning the Jews, how is it that he was not impacted by the miracles that were wrought when Moshe *Rabbeinu* and Aharon *HaKohen* demanded that he set the Jews free? If the original Pharaoh was so dazzled by Yosef following what was one powerful interpretation of his dreams, seeing the extraordinary miracles that accompanied Moshe and Aharon’s remonstrance to let Hashem’s people go should have bowled him over. This cannot be the same Pharaoh, or did his memory suddenly change with his stripes?

Horav David Povarsky, zl, explains that essentially it is the backdrop of the two encounters which distinguishes the two sides of Pharaoh. When Yosef portended to Pharaoh concerning the events of the next fourteen years, he made no demands of Pharaoh. Indeed, Pharaoh, in all practicality, made a very judicious move by appointing Yosef as viceroy. It made Pharaoh appear benevolent, and did not endanger his position as ruler of the country. On the contrary, it enhanced his position and made him wealthy beyond his dreams. Furthermore, Pharaoh retained his position while simultaneously adding the services of an astute advisor.

Conversely, Moshe and Aharon sought to transform Egypt’s workforce by catalyzing the Jewish slaves release from their bondage. When one is asked – nay, demanded –to free millions of slaves, it becomes quite personal. This would invariably have put a strain on the Egyptians and, by extension, Pharaoh’s pocket. Under such conditions, Pharaoh was not going to react positively to Moshe and Aharon – regardless of the convincing powers of their miracles. As long as it cost nothing, Pharaoh had no argument with a newly-freed slave becoming viceroy. When his personal interests were affected, it became an altogether different story.

Horav Reuven Karlinstein, zl, sums this up with an anecdote that leaves us with a true – but bitter – lesson. A man standing on a bridge saw another man fall into the ocean and attempt to save himself from drowning. The waves were pummeling him, as he fought valiantly to remain afloat and swim to shore. The man on the bridge took all this in and, in an attempt to rescue the drowning man, jumped off the bridge into the water. He, too, fought the waves and reached the man, “Give me your hand!” he screamed. No response. “Give me your hand; I cannot save you unless you stretch out your hand!” No reaction. The man would go down unless he did something to help himself. Someone who was on the bridge heard the screams of the would-be-rescuer and called out to him, “Do not tell him to give you his hand. Tell him to grab your hand!” The rescuer listened

and instead yelled, "Quick, grab my hand!" He did and was saved.

The man was willing to take the rescuer's hand. He was not prepared to give his own hand first. Sad, but, unfortunately true. Some people spite themselves waiting for assistance, when all they have to do is stretch out a hand and ask for it.