

Pharaoh said to Yosef... “There can be no one so discerning and wise as you.” (41:39)

Pharaoh mentions *navon*, discerning, before *chacham*, wise. In *Devarim* 1:13, concerning the appointment of judges, the Torah writes, *Havu lachem anashim chachamim u'nevonim*, “Provide for yourselves distinguished men who are wise and discerning (well-known).” What is the reason for the disparity? *Horav Moshe Shternbuch, Shlita*, explains *chochmah* as basic wisdom, knowledge that one receives from his forebears – without personal embellishment or supplementation. *Tevunah*, discernment, is what one understands on his own, thus enabling him to add to the knowledge that he has acquired.

With this principle in mind, we can understand the difference between the Jewish and the non-Jewish perspective on *chochmah* and *tevunah*. The secular/non-Jewish world views their forebears in a negative light: crude; primitive; uneducated; quaint; archaic; etc. As a result, their ancestors for them is superficial at best. They view themselves as cultured, educated, forward-thinking and refined – with absolutely nothing to learn from the previous generations.

We, however, understand that every generation that was closer in the chain of transmission to *Har Sinai* is greater, holier, more perceptive and more profoundly educated. *Chazal (Shabbos 112b)* teach this when they say, “If the first ones (the generations that preceded us) are in our eyes as angels, then we may view ourselves as human beings. If, however, we consider our forebears to be human beings, then we are mere donkeys.” In other words, if we lack the cognition to differentiate between the greatness of our ancestors and us, we are to be compared to donkeys.

Pharaoh mentioned discernment before wisdom because he thought he had nothing to learn from his ancestors. He valued his own perspective before that of his predecessors. We understand that the wisdom handed down to us from our ancestors is the basis upon which we build our discernment.

It is well-known that the secular streams which have attempted to undermine Jewish observance were founded on their ability to separate the present from the past. They encouraged a complete break in the generations, because the ghetto *Yid*, with his “ghetto mentality,” had nothing to teach us. His lifestyle was archaic, his beliefs primitive and outdated, his outlook unsophisticated. This was their tactic, which sadly worked and enabled them to tear the fabric of Jewish connection between the generations. This set the foundation for the heresy which they preached. Everyone wanted the “new” because the “old” was antiquated.

We find Yosef naming his first son Menashe, because *ki neshani Elokim es kol amali v'es kol bais avi*, “G-d has made me forget all my hardship and all my father’s household” (41:51). Forgetting one’s past severs his relationship with his power source and his sense of pride and esteem. How would Yosef have maintained his religious ties if he were to have broken with the past?

The *Brisker Rav, zl*, explains that had Yosef remembered his father's home, he would have been hard-pressed to survive emotionally, the degeneration from the apex of spirituality which reigned in his home, to the nadir of moral depravity which defined Egyptian culture. Dealing in contrasts is much more difficult than addressing the present challenges one by one as they emerge.

Horav Yisrael Salanter, zl, explains Yosef's thankfulness at being able to forget what his brothers did to him and not harbor any ill feelings against them. They were agents of Hashem whose Divine imperative it was that Yosef go down to Egypt – under such miserable circumstances.

Rav Shternbuch relates that he heard from an *Admor* that Yosef was raised in his home to be righteous, G-d-fearing and totally immersed in the *daled amos*, four cubits, of *halachah*. In the end, Hashem altered the focus of his life. Hashem wanted him to administrate Egypt's prosperity and eventual hunger. When Yosef saw that Hashem wanted him to shift gears and leave the idyllic world of Torah study and instead ensconce himself in a mundane lifestyle far-removed from Torah and spirituality, he was thankful to be able to forget the past in order to concentrate on the present – and be happy about it. This was Hashem's choice for him. He must accept it with joy. Living in the past would only make his present unbearable.

At times, we see Hashem's guiding hand moving us in a different direction than we had planned. One wants to spend his life devoted to Torah study, and a series of Heavenly-guided events turn his focus to *Klal* work, serving the greater Jewish community. No one else can do the job. Obviously, this is Heaven's directive. *Horav Zalmen Sorotzkin, zl*, *Lutzker Rav*, was a brilliant scholar and prolific *Rav*. He left Europe for *Eretz Yisrael* with his goal being full-time devotion to Torah study and dissemination. Then *Horav Aharon Kotler, zl*, called and asked him to take the helm of *Chinuch Atzmai*. No one else was as capable. As a result of *Rav Zalmen's* unparalleled *mesiras nefesh*, relinquishing his own *ruchniyos*, spirituality, for the betterment of the Jewish community, *Chinuch Atzmai* has successfully educated and saved the spiritual living of hundreds of thousands of children and their families. It was Hashem's will, and he accepted it.