

## **And there, with us, was a Hebrew youth, a slave of the chamberlain of the bakers. (41:12)**

*Rashi* quotes *Chazal* (*Bereishis Rabbah* 89:7), “Cursed are the wicked because even their favors are incomplete!” The chamberlain described Yosef in the most disparaging terms: a *naar*, youth; ignorant and unfit for distinction; *Ivri*, Hebrew; a foreigner not conversant in the prevalent culture and language; *eved*, a slave; about whom it is written in Egyptian law that he can neither be a ruler nor wear the robes of a noble man. In other words, even when they are supposedly nice, it is with great reluctance and insincerity. After all, they cannot allow the Jew to be superior to them. We wonder how the chamberlain could have had the temerity to aver that Yosef was not versed in the Egyptian language. Once they would have presented Yosef to Pharaoh, and he would have opened his mouth to speak, they would have all known that Yosef spoke Egyptian.

*Horav Moshe Neriyah, zl*, explains that the pagan’s disdain for the Jew got the better of him. He was so blind with contempt that he felt that a lowly, imprisoned slave would never enter into the king’s drawing room. This was a place reserved for dignitaries. The Jewish prisoner would be interviewed by one of the king’s aides, given a few dollars and sent along on his way. A face-to-face with Pharaoh would never take place.

Hashem, however, had other plans for Yosef. We note that, when the royal guards came to take Yosef from his prison cell, the Torah states, “They rushed him from the dungeon” (ibid 41:14). Yosef did not rush; they rushed him. One would expect a prisoner who had been locked up in a dungeon to run at the first sign of release. Not Yosef. He was calm and collected. He would leave when it was most convenient and propitious for him. He left with dignity, proving that he was no ordinary slave. He was royalty locked up with men who had run afoul of Egyptian society. The Egyptians never planned to give Yosef a haircut and change his dirty, smelly clothes. He insisted on it, “It is not fitting for me to greet Pharaoh in such a dirty, disheveled manner.” He insisted; they listened. He then left the dungeon with a gait befitting a high-ranking official about to have a meeting with the king. When the guards of the royal palace saw Yosef coming towards them, they knew they were in the presence of refinement.

To complete the scenario, *Horav Meir Simchah HaKohen, zl* (*Meshech Chochmah*), asks why was it necessary for Yosef to spend a year in prison together with the two chamberlains? Surely, a month or two would have sufficed. Apparently, Yosef’s duration in prison was Heavenly-mandated, so that he could spend time with these two ministers, listen to them as they filled him in on the ways and means of the palace. Furthermore, Yosef was in the “farm” prison, which was reserved for government white-collar criminals. His fellow prisoners were high-ranking officials who had fallen into disfavor. Thus, when Yosef appeared in the palace, it was understandable that he was to be welcomed into Pharaoh’s inner circle, since he was not an ordinary prisoner. He was royalty.