

It happened two years to the day, Pharaoh was dreaming. (41:1)

At the end of *Parashas Vayeishev* (*Bereishis* 40:23), *Rashi* cites *Midrash Rabbah* (*Bereishis* 89:3), which teaches that Yosef placed his trust in the chamberlain to put in a few good words about him to Pharaoh. Perhaps this would secure his release from prison. For someone of Yosef *HaTzadik's* elevated spiritual level, relying on people was beneath him. Thus, Yosef's sentence was changed, and two more years were added. His request implied a subtle lack of *bitachon*, trust. Not that Yosef should have avoided exerting his *hishtadlus*, effort, which is crucial, but his heart relied too heavily on human intervention, rather than solely on Hashem.

Let us imagine for a moment where Yosef was, what an Egyptian prison was like, and who was confined there. First of all, Yosef did not have the luxury of a prison cell. He was thrown into a pit. This was to be his home. Can we fathom the physical and emotional pain that he must have endured? The other prisoners were members of the lowest strata of Egyptian society, the trash of the populace. So while Yosef certainly placed his trust in Hashem and understood that he would leave the prison only when Hashem's plan for him had been realized, was it necessary for him to have suffered so immensely, to have been exposed to such a morally bankrupt environment? Being away from home and family, having to suffer alone in silence was challenging enough – or was it not?

Horav Gershon Liebman, zl (*Rosh Yeshivah*, Ohr Yosef, Novaradok, France), explains that the mere fact that these questions are present in our mind is an indication of how distant we are from understanding the depth of Torah perspective. We have questions; indeed, some may even have *taanos*, complaints, when, in fact, due to our limited perception, we do not realize that every bit of the pain, every ounce of suffering, and every moral and spiritual challenge that Yosef endured – were intrinsic to his preparation for his ultimate ascent. Salvation would come, only when Yosef and the world could see that the instrument was the direct hand of Hashem. The farther one is pushed down, the greater the disbelief when he achieves a position of such extraordinary power that even the most closed-minded, obtuse individual realizes that it was a miracle that transformed his life. When a person on death row suddenly, out of the blue, becomes President of the United States, it is a miracle of epic proportion.

Yosef's additional years in confinement were not wasted there. Indeed, they were a powerful lesson in life. In any form, salvation refers to the various "prisons" of life --- health/illness, economic, actual prison, raising children and then marrying them off. It is never the product of "connecting" *protektzia*, clever strategy, or mere chance. It is the direct result of Hashem's decree. When the proper moment arrives, He orchestrates events in such a manner that no one with a modicum of intelligence can deny His guiding hand.

We do not realize the Heavenly repercussions: to a *tzadik* such as Yosef, asking to be

remembered; to Avraham Avinu's, *Ba'ma eida ki Irashenu*, "How do I know that I will inherit (*Eretz Yisrael*), which resulted in the Egyptian exile; to Yaakov Avinu's, *Yemei shnei chayai me'at v'ra'im*, "The days of the years of my life are few and bad," which cost him thirty-three years of his life. What did Yaakov do wrong? Pharaoh asked a question, and he replied. *Sforno* explains that, had Yaakov been filled with joy, it would have been manifest in his countenance and demeanor; thus, Pharaoh would not have had a reason to question his age.

In the *Rosh Yeshivah's* thesis on the festival of *Chanukah* (*Parashas Mikeitz* most often occurs during *Chanukah*), he observes that both *Chanukah* and *Purim* are Rabbinically decreed festivals which were established to commemorate miracles our people experienced. During *Purim*, we prayed and fasted – Hashem listened, and we were spared. No one would have doubted that it was only due to Hashem's intervention that we lived to talk about it. *Chanukah*, which was no less the product of a miracle, could appear to the uninitiated and to those who seek to remain clueless as a military victory, since the small band of Maccabees was able to overthrow and triumph over the Greeks. Thus, the miracle revolves around the small vial of pure oil that was discovered still with the seal of the *Kohen Gadol* still intact on it. *Chazal* feared that people might focus on the military victory, rather than the miracle. The military victory was no less a miracle than discovering the oil, but, as we have often seen, people who refuse to concede to the miraculous nature of an event often rationalize away a miracle and attribute their salvation to military prowess and ingenuity.

A well-known contemporary story illustrates this principle. A young man in *Eretz Yisrael* was desperate for employment. Despite his education, he sent out dozens of resumes and attended interview after interview, only to face rejection at every turn. Months passed, and his savings dwindled. In despair, he turned to his *rebbe* for guidance. The *rebbe* told him, "You are not unemployed; you are being employed by Hashem to learn *bitachon*. The minute you absorb that lesson, the true position destined for you will appear."

Shortly thereafter, the young man received a phone call from a company to which he had never even applied. They had seen his name through a friend of a friend, and they offered him a position tailor-made for his skills. The job turned out to be far better than any of the opportunities he had previously pursued.

Looking back, the young man understood: had one of the earlier "doors" opened, he might have thought his own efforts had borne fruit. Only when every avenue had been shut tight could he truly appreciate that his salvation came directly from Above.

This is the eternal message of Yosef *HaTzadik*. The prison doors did not open until the exact moment that Hashem decreed. And when they did, Yosef was not simply released; he was elevated to the position of viceroy of Egypt. Salvation is not merely escape from difficulty; it is the hand of Hashem guiding us to a destiny greater than we could have envisioned.