

FAITH IN HASHEM BRINGS ABUNDANT BLESSING AND SUCCESS

The Path To Follow Mikeitz

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Guard Your Tongue!

Did You See What He Did To Me?

It sometimes happens that we speak Lashon Harah in a fleeting moment of rage, but once the bitterness of our hearts has been poured out, we stop complaining to people (who might believe our disparaging words). In such a case, it is a mitzvah to listen to a person's embittered complaints, though we must keep in mind that it is forbidden to believe any disparaging remark we may hear.

When Joseph entered the bank, Meir went to meet him in a state of rage. "Did you see what Jacobson did to me?" Meir said, completely beside himself with anger. Joseph, who knew Meir quite well, realized that his anger would soon subside. He felt that if he heard Meir out, he would calm down and stop disparaging Jacobson. Hence Joseph stayed around and patiently listened to him.

Joseph acted properly, though in his heart he must reject what he heard and not believe it.

The Gemara tells us that when Pharaoh decided to make Joseph the ruler of Egypt after he had successfully interpreted his dreams, the Egyptian astrologers wanted to test Joseph and see if he knew the 70 languages. The angel Gabriel then came and taught them to Joseph, and thus he was able to converse with Pharaoh in any language that he spoke. On the other hand, when Joseph spoke to Pharaoh in the holy tongue, he could not answer because he did not understand it. Pharaoh then made Joseph swear not to reveal the fact that he knew the holy tongue while Pharaoh did not (Sotah 36b).

This implies that in Egypt, the custom was to appoint the wisest man among the people as a ruler, one who knew the 70 languages. Otherwise, we would be unable to understand why Pharaoh was afraid that people would find out that Joseph knew one language more than him, since he was the king and ruler of Egypt. Pharaoh knew that if the Egyptians learned that Joseph was wiser than him, they would have removed him from the throne and placed Joseph there instead. Pharaoh therefore made him swear not to reveal this secret, so that he could remain on the throne and not be stripped of power. This needs to be clarified. Pharaoh was incredibly deceitful and completely estranged from the truth. That being the case, how could he believe that Joseph, who had recently come from prison, would keep his promise and not reveal his secret? When he would bestow Joseph with greatness by making him his viceroy, a love for honor would certainly grow in him. He would eventually want to reign in Pharaoh's stead, thus paving the way to reveal the secret to people and become king in his place. To understand this, let us examine what Pharaoh went through during that day. He had strange dreams about cows and ears of wheat, dreams that he did not understand. He awoke that morning completely bewildered, and he called upon the wise men and magicians in Egypt to interpret his dreams. Although this demonstrated his weakness to the people (insofar as his request for help was an admission that he needed the assistance of his wise men), his disturbed frame of mind did let him consider the consequences. All he wanted was to understand what his dreams meant. The wise men and magicians, however, were unable to satisfactorily interpret his dreams.

Joseph was then called up from prison, for he was experienced in interpreting dreams. Pharaoh said to him, "I have dreamed a dream, and there is no one interpret of it. Now I heard it said of you that you understand a dream to interpret it" (Genesis 41:15). In other words: You are therefore wiser than I am, and you should be seated on the throne instead of me, but this doesn't bother me, for I prefer to liberate the throne just as long I learn the meaning of my dreams. Joseph answered Pharaoh with self-effacement and humility:

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"Not in me. G-d will answer" (v.16). That is: Even once I have given you the interpretation of your dreams, and once everyone sees that I am wiser than you, I will still have no desire to take the throne and reign over Egypt. This is because I am nothing, and all my wisdom comes from G-d. The world has a Creator, and He made us both. Only He exists and we are simply His creations. Even if I interpret your dreams, that does not make me wiser than you because everything comes from G-d, and therefore I have nothing for which to be proud. Thus Joseph interpreted Pharaoh's dreams with complete submission and humility before the Holy One, blessed be He. In order for the Egyptians not to revolt against Pharaoh and place Joseph on the throne, Joseph took the initiative by stating: "G-d shall answer the welfare of Pharaoh" (v.16) and "What G-d is about to do, He has told Pharaoh" (v.25). In other words, Joseph wanted Pharaoh to remain on his throne and continue ruling over Egypt, for Joseph did not want to reign in his place after having interpreted his dreams. This is because it was not Hashem's will that he should be king, but that Pharaoh should continue in that role.

At that point Pharaoh was amazed at Joseph's wisdom and intelligence on the one hand, and by his humility on the other. Joseph could have easily ascended to the throne, yet he refrained from doing so simply because it was not Hashem's will. Pharaoh immediately decided that Joseph should govern Egypt under his supervision according to Hashem's will, and the wise men of Egypt also understood that Joseph was the best-suited man for the task. Hence they decided to appoint him as such. However since it was impossible to appoint a person to govern Egypt unless he was familiar with the 70 languages, they had to test him to see if he actually knew them. A miracle then occurred, for the angel Gabriel came and instantly taught them to Joseph.

Pharaoh said to his servants, "Can we find another like him, a man in whom is the spirit of G-d?" (Genesis 41:38). In other words: Despite his wisdom and intelligence, the humility that this man demonstrates, and his distaste for flattery, makes the spirit of G-d dwell in him. Far from considering himself a god, he is self-effacing before G-d and believes that everything comes from Him. He believes solely in Him and submits to Him. In fact by saying these things, Pharaoh was publicly recognizing that the world has a Creator, that everything comes from Him, and that He created everything and rules the entire world. However the wicked, even when they believe in Hashem (that is, when reality leaves them no choice but to believe), they do so only because of personal interest. Hence after the death of Joseph, Pharaoh pretended not to know or acknowledge the Creator, and he began to reduce the Children of Israel to slavery. However Jews do not act in this way, for they believe in the Creator of the world and know that everything comes from Him. It is precisely by believing in the Creator of the world that they merit abundant blessing and success, as we see with Joseph when he achieved royalty following the demonstration of his faith.

MUSSAR FROM THE PARSHA

A Sign From Heaven

It is written, "One opened his sack...and he saw his money...and they turned trembling one to another and said, 'What is this that G-d has done to us?'" (Genesis 42:27-28).

Up until the time they discovered the money in their sacks, Joseph's brothers were certain that selling him had been legitimate, and even justified according to all the details of Halachah. However when they saw that their money was returned, they immediately began to tremble and ask what G-d had done to them. They realized that this was not just "a simple error" on the part of the Egyptian border guards. Things like this did not "just happen." The brothers saw this as a sign from Heaven, and they once again examined their deeds to see if, despite their previous conclusions, they were mistaken in having sold Joseph. They received a sign from Heaven, and they understood.

Though we too often receive signs from Heaven, do we understand them?

As an example, let us describe the sign received by the gaon Rabbi Yechezkel Levenstein Zatzal, the Mashgiach of Mir and Ponevezh, a sign that he understood. Having lost his parents as a boy, he earned a living by selling flowers. One Friday afternoon, after a long day of work, Rabbi Yechezkel entered the mikveh carrying all the money he had earned that week. When he came out, however, his pockets were empty! He realized that someone had stolen all his money, and he saw this as a sign from Heaven. Thinking about it, he asked himself: "Do I want to place all my time and effort, all my energy, into something that is transitory and which can easily be taken from me? Of course not! With Hashem's help, from now on I'm going to invest in something that's completely safe from theft, something that no one else can take." He acted on his decision and devoted himself entirely to the service of Hashem and the fear of Heaven. He entered yeshiva, and by the merit of this decision we were privileged to have one of the greatest Mashgichim of our times.

At one point or another, everyone receives a sign telling him to change his ways and improve his deeds. A sign can be given in a general way, as in the case above, or in great detail. The gaon Rabbi Isser Zalman Meltzer Zatzal was once told that a boiling pot of milk had overflowed in his home. He immediately reacted by telling the Rebbetzin, "I know why it happened. This morning I gave only one slice of bread to a poor fellow who came to the house and asked me for two slices. The amount of milk that overflowed certainly had the same value as the slice of bread that I refused to give him!"

Everyone receives signs from Heaven, though not everyone can merit to understand them. Although tzaddikim understand even the slightest of signs, we who have not reached their level must at least do our best to comprehend what signs we can. We must try to understand them and act accordingly, thereby improving our deeds.

A Pearl From the Rav

When Jacob's sons went down to Egypt, Joseph said to them: "You are spies" (Genesis 42:9). Shimon was later imprisoned (v.24), and at the end of the parsha, when a cup was found in Benjamin's sack, Judah offered all the brothers as slaves. To that offer Joseph replied: "The man in whose possession the cup was found, only he shall be my slave" (Genesis 44:17). In his book Pahad David, Rabbi David Pinto Shlita states: Joseph's brothers saw that something strange was happening. At first they were punished for being spies, but then they alone were invited to eat with Joseph. Next, Benjamin was accused of theft, though it is clear that a tzaddik like Benjamin would not have stolen or engaged in divination, since the Torah forbids such things. As a result, this was obviously a plot that was hatched against them. Yet why did they not revolt? We already know that they were so strong that Shimon and Levi

alone destroyed the entire city of Shechem, though they were only 13 years old at the time.

To explain this, we recall the Sages' statement that when a man is inundated with troubles, he should reflect upon his deeds. From this we see that there is no reason to believe that Hashem sends people hardships without reason. It is the limited scope of our understanding that prevents us from grasping the meaning of His actions.

Consequently, the sons of Jacob knew that everything they went through was on account of their deeds. Thus they reflected upon their conduct in order to better themselves, which is why they were ready to accept every hardship so as to rectify their deeds.

The Duty to Put An Effort Into Things

It is written, "It happened at the end of two years" (Genesis 41:1).

Citing the Midrash Rabba, the Ohr HaChaim states, "Because [Joseph] said: 'If only you would think of me' and 'Mention me' [Genesis 40:14], two years were added to him."

It was said that the Brisker Rav once asked Rabbi Shimon Shkop Zatzal, "What would have happened if Joseph had said just one thing: 'Mention me'?"

Rabbi Shimon replied that since two years were added to his imprisonment for having said two things, then it seems logical that one year would have been added for saying one thing. The Brisker Rav replied that it didn't work this way. If Joseph had only said one thing, then nothing – not even a single year – would have been added to his imprisonment, for it is a person's duty to put an effort into getting things done. It may have been that saying just one thing would have been considered the effort that Joseph had to exert on his own behalf. It was only when he added a second request that the first lost its status as an expression of his effort, and therefore two years were added in one fell swoop by including his first request.

He Played For Me

It is written, "Now let Pharaoh seek out a discerning and wise man" (Genesis 41:33).

Two neighbors once appeared in a Din Torah before the gaon Rabbi Yechezkel Landau Zatzal (the author of Noda B'Yehuda). The case was an unusual one, for a musician had played in the yard that separated their two homes, and each neighbor thought that he was playing for him. The two men were wealthy, and they each gave the Rav 10 gold coins. The Rav said, "The truth is that the musician was playing just for me," since the Rav ended up with the money!

The same happened with Pharaoh, for he thought that he was being shown such an important dream because Heaven certainly considered him to be an important figure. The Egyptians believed that the dream was meant for them, but Joseph understood that it was destined to make him achieve greatness. He therefore said, "Now let Pharaoh seek out a discerning and wise man" – for that was the goal of the dream that was revealed to you. Incidentally, Pharaoh understood the profundity of Joseph's words, and so he said to him: "There is no one so discerning and wise as you" (Genesis 41:39).

– Otzar Chaim

Do Whatever He Says

It is written, "The people cried out to Pharaoh for bread, so Pharaoh said to all of Egypt: 'Go to Joseph. Whatever he tells you, you should do'" (Genesis 41:55).

An assimilated unbeliever boasted to Rabbi Yonatan Eibeshutz Zatzal that he had not circumcised his son, adding that the custom of circumcision was a vestige from the era of idolatry. He claimed that it was first practiced in ancient Egypt, and that from there it spread to the other nations of the world.

REASONS FOR THE MITZVOT

Chanukah and Parsha Mikeitz

What message is hidden in the fact that Parsha Mikeitz is always read during Chanukah? To explain this, let us begin with the following story:

During the First World War, Rabbi Chaim of Brisk Zatzal was forced to flee his city and find shelter near the home of the gaon Rabbi Avraham Kalmanovitz Zatzal. When Rabbi Avraham learned that Rabbi Chaim was staying nearby, he was worried about him. He knew that Rabbi Chaim was in need of money, and because the Rav was extremely meticulous with regards to kashrut, he was certainly in need of food as well. Rabbi Avraham therefore filled up a cart with food and brought it to him. As he approached the house where the Rav was staying, Rabbi Avraham could hear voices on the inside that were so loud, they could not hear him knocking. He was therefore forced to open the front door himself, at which point he realized that all the children and grandchildren were sleeping. As for Rabbi Chaim and his son Rabbi Yitzchak Zev, they were at the table discussing a question in the Rambam that Rabbi Chaim's son-in-law had raised.

Rabbi Avraham was stunned, for how could Rabbi Chaim and his family have fled from Brisk with only their clothes on their backs, absolutely nothing else, yet not seem worried in the least? Instead they were taking pleasure in the words of the Rambam! As the Psalmist writes, "If Your Torah had not been my delight, I would have perished in my affliction" (Psalms 119:92), for the Torah removes the darkness of misery.

This is what Joseph in Parsha Mikeitz and Chanukah have in common. We must ask from where Joseph derived the strength to stand strong, him and his sons, in an impure land such as Egypt, be it as a slave sold to any buyer or as a viceroy who decided everything that happened in Egypt.

The answer is that Jacob passed on to Joseph everything he had learned in the academy of Shem and Eber. Furthermore, according to our Sages Joseph also studied Torah in Egypt and raised his children in the same way. That was the only remedy he found useful in Egypt. He was not afraid of being so few among the multitudes of others, those who pursued the vanities of life, for he clearly knew that the immense darkness in which he lived could be driven away by just a tiny bit of light.

This was also the power of the Hasmoneans. They were just a single family of Torah scholars, as we say in the prayers: "The wanton sinners into the hands of those who occupy themselves with Your Torah," and they were faced with hordes of brave and powerful Greek warriors. They clearly knew that the war the Greeks waged against them was primarily meant to make them forget the Torah and disregard Hashem's will. They also knew that the Torah, which is light, had the power to drive away a great deal of darkness. Thus the mighty were delivered into the hands of the weak, the many into the hands of the few, and the impure into the hands of those who study Torah.

EISHET CHAYIL

We Can Make Due

The daughter of Rabbi Yechiel Gordon Zatzal became engaged, and her husband to be, the gaon Rabbi Eizik, had been promised \$500 for the costs of the wedding. Rabbi Gordon was in London at that time, and he wrote a letter to his daughter in which he detailed his plans. He explained that upon arriving in the United States, he would send her the money so that the wedding could be held on time. His daughter's response did not take long in coming, and in her letter she mentioned that one of her friends was in an even worse predicament. Her friend had also recently been engaged, but now it seemed that she would have to cancel her wedding. The reason was that the \$500 that her father promised for the wedding had been lent to someone who could not repay it in time.

In her letter, Rabbi Gordon's daughter therefore said that she and her fiancée were begging him to give the \$500 to her friend. As for Rabbi Gordon's daughter, she and Rav Eizik would make due with what they had.

"True," replied Rabbi Yonatan, "it is explicitly stated in the book of Genesis, 'Whatever he tells you, you should do,' and on this Rashi explains: 'For Joseph had told them to be circumcised.' It follows that the Egyptians did indeed circumcise their sons. Yet from whom did they learn this custom? From Joseph the Jew."

Disagreeing with Rabbi Yonatan, the unbeliever continued to argue his point: "That doesn't make sense. Why would Joseph have wanted the Egyptians to circumcise themselves?"

Rabbi Yonatan explained: "We have always had 'progressive' unbelievers in our midst, those who want to resemble other nations and whose motto is, 'Let us be like all the other peoples.' Joseph tried to get the Egyptians to circumcise themselves, for in doing so there was a chance that the unbelievers intent on emulating the Egyptians would also circumcise their sons."

You Deserve More

It is written, "Return their money, each into his sack" (Genesis 42:25).

Why did Joseph return his brothers' money to them? We can better understand this by the following story: Rabbi Eitan was a highly skilled scribe living in Bnei Brak. One day a Jew came to him and wanted to order a Sefer Torah. However since he did not have enough to purchase an entire Sefer, he explained this to Rabbi Eitan and proposed an arrangement whereby he would purchase a single sheet of parchment from him each month. Rabbi Eitan accepted, and they agreed on a price and finalized the transaction.

This occurred during a time of very high inflation, and within a few months the agreed upon price no longer covered the numerous expenses involved in making the Sefer Torah. The buyer, who was a G-d-fearing man, went to the scribe and asked him to raise his prices. However the scribe, who was no less G-d-fearing, did not want to hear of it: "We've already agreed upon a price, so why should I take more?" The buyer could not rest easy with this arrangement, and so he brought the scribe to a Din Torah of the gaon Rav Wozner Shlita. He wanted to force the scribe to raise his prices in order to compensate for inflation.

Joseph wanted to be sure that his brothers would return to Egypt, which is why he placed their money in their sacs. He knew that they would not keep money that was not theirs, but would instead return and give it back.

– Alenu Leshabeach

Overview of the Parsha

In this week's parsha, Joseph is taken out of prison, appointed as viceroy of Egypt, and charged with overseeing commercial trade with Egypt's neighbors. He also deceives his brothers when they come to Egypt to buy wheat.

Because Joseph could interpret dreams in prison, he was called upon to interpret Pharaoh's dreams, after which he was elevated to the rank of viceroy. The years of abundance in the land ended, and those of famine began, prompting Joseph's brothers to come to Egypt to buy food. Recalling his dreams, Joseph hid his identity from his brothers, accused them of being spies, and imprisoned Shimon while allowing the rest to return home. When their food began to run out, Joseph's brothers returned to Egypt with Benjamin, their youngest brother, who was now Judah's responsibility. Benjamin received more things than his brothers as they dined in the home of Joseph, who once again accused them of a plot, this time to steal his cup.

YOUR EYES SHALL BEHOLD YOUR TEACHER

Rabbi Aharon Schiller – The Rav and Av Beit Din of Pinsk

Rabbi Aharon Schiller was a gaon and great Kabbalist. He began as the Rav and Av Beit Din of the city of Kartinga, and then of Pinsk. He was constantly reading the responsa issued by the author of Mishkenot Yaakov (the gaon Rabbi Yaakov of Karlin), and together they elevated themselves in the revealed Torah, in which nothing was hidden from them. Rabbi Aharon composed his famous work Tosaphot Aharon, and he also wrote commentaries on several tractates with exceptional insight in order to clarify the difficult Tosaphot that had remained unexplained. In this book, he also demonstrated his great abilities in the hidden wisdom of the Kabbalah, to the point that the gaon Rabbi Yaakov Meir Padova loved his work and said that all the hidden mysteries and gates of Kabbalah were open to him.

Rabbi Aharon was also versed in other fields as well, such as the natural sciences and mathematics. Due to his great knowledge, he could help people in many fields, and if the need arose he was prepared to use supernatural means to help the unfortunate. Many inhabitants of his city and the surrounding towns came to him for advice, and especially for his help. Rabbi Aharon Schiller remained as the Rav of Pinsk for many years, until his death on Tevet 5, 5602. The memory of the tzaddik is truly a blessing.

IN THE LIGHT OF THE HAFTORAH

Cast Me In With It!

It is written, “The hinges of the doors of the inner House, the Holy of Holies...in gold” (I Kings 7:50).

The Gemara states, “It was reported that when Nicanor went to retrieve doors from Alexandria in Egypt, on his return a gale arose in the sea to drown him. At that point they took one of the doors and cast it into the sea, but the sea would not stop raging. When they prepared to cast the other [door] into the sea, he arose and clung to it, saying: ‘Cast me in with it!’ At that point the sea immediately stopped raging. He was deeply grieved about the other [door]. As he arrived at the harbor of Akko, it broke through and came up from under the sides of the boat. ...Therefore all the gates in the Sanctuary were changed for golden ones with the exception of the Nicanor gates, because of the miracles that occurred with them” (Yoma 38a).

Let us examine this story a little closer. It was precisely when he decided to give his life for the mitzvah that Heaven intervened to help him, at which point the sea stopped raging. Not only was he saved, but Heaven also perceived his painful regret at not having offered his life for the first door as well. This is why it was returned to him. He also merited that the doors he returned with were not changed.

A MATTER OF EDUCATION

Our Hearts Did Not Turn Back

Antiochus was devastated when he heard of Nicanor’s death, and he dispatched Begeris with a vast army to Jerusalem, where he laid siege to the city. They issued a royal proclamation to the effect that any man or woman who disobeyed the king and kept the Sabbaths of G-d, celebrated the New Moon, or practiced circumcision would be put to death. So it was that many Jews were martyred for the glory of G-d, rather than violate the covenant of their forefathers. One Levite woman sanctified G-d’s Name by first circumcising her son on the eighth day of his life, and celebrating the occasion with drums and dancing. Then she climbed one of the walls of Jerusalem with her son in her arms, and she cried out, “Master of the universe, despite all that has befallen us, we have not forgotten You and we have not been untrue to Your covenant. Our heart has not turned back, nor have our steps strayed from Your ways” [Psalms 44:19]. Then she threw herself down from the wall, and they both perished. Many did the same, refusing to disobey the covenant of their fathers, and honoring the Holy One of Israel.

When Yochanan the son of Matiyahu and his four brothers heard of this, they took up arms. Then, placing their trust in G-d, they attacked the enemy and routed them in countless numbers. Only Begeris survived, and he fled to King Antiochus together with a few wounded and dispirited survivors. “You sent us to do away with their Sabbath, New Moon, and circumcision celebrations,” reported Begeris. “Instead, you and all your armies will wither. For not even all the nations together are sufficient to withstand the five sons of Matiyahu the High Priest. More mighty than lions are they and more fleet than eagles.”

– From Midrash Chanukah

A TRUE STORY

Do Not Sin Against the Child

It is written, “Did I not speak to you saying, ‘Do not sin against the child’ ” (Genesis 42:22).

When Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveitchik learned that a portion of the Jews in the town of Slutzk (among whom were wealthy and influential people) were not sending their children to talmudei Torah and yeshivot, he called the parents in one by one and tried to gently convince them to change their minds.

When he realized that this was not working, he assembled all the Jews of Slutzk and criticized the parents of the children in question. As tears rolled down his eyes, he said to them: “Why are you sinning against the souls of your children?” He also mentioned the Gemara’s discussion of a widow who is “maintained from [her husband’s] orphans’ estate” (Ketubot 52b), citing the words of the Amora Rav Yosef, for whom this applies only as long as the widow acts as such. That is, if she puts on makeup, sustenance is no longer owing to her (ibid. 54a). Since she adorns herself, it is obvious that she has turned her thoughts away from her first husband and plans on remarrying. Rabbi Yosef Dov said, “Similarly, the Jewish community in exile is like a widow, and the Holy One, blessed be He, must assume all her needs. However if she begins to put on makeup and tries to make herself attractive to non-Jewish society, she can no longer ask G-d to take pity on her!”

Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveitchik’s words made a tremendous impact on his listeners. Many decided to heed his warnings, thereby removing their children from non-Jewish schools.

– Marbitzei Torah U’Mussar