

## **Rabbi James Proops, Parashat Miketz**

The parsha begins with Yosef being called from his prison cell to stand before the almighty Paro and interpret his troublesome dreams. We are told that “va’yeritzuhu - they rushed him” which the Chofetz Chaim explains as a demonstration that God’s salvation happens “in the blink of an eye”. One second, Yosef is imprisoned in a dungeon, the next he stands before Paro speaking the word of God. So it will be with the final Redemption. However when we consider that Yosef’s situation changed so dramatically and swiftly we realize that despite cutting his hair and changing his clothes, he barely had time to collect his thoughts and prepare himself for this auspicious meeting. Yet despite his lack of preparedness, Yosef carries himself with great poise and calmly interprets Paro’s dreams explaining in detail the message that they carry. Not only does he interpret the dreams but with language stronger than a mere suggestion, he proceeds to advise Paro on what course of action should be taken, namely to store grain during the years of plenty and distribute it during the years of famine. How can we understand Yosef’s confidence and self-assured attitude as he stood before the mighty Paro? Would he not have been intimidated to take on such a job? We can imagine that having emerged from his 12 year sojourn in jail his self esteem would have been more than just a little damaged, yet he shows no timidity as he ‘steps up to the plate’. From where did Yosef muster this courage and inner strength?

The key to understanding Yosef’s attitude and behaviour is to contemplate some of his life experiences and the resulting lessons which he gleaned from them. As a boy he was his father’s seemingly favorite son, treated differently, given a special coat and therefore elevated position above his brothers. Yet despite his trajectory for leadership and greatness he found himself wallowing in a pit only to be sold in to slavery by his own family. He then seemed, to once again be destined for

relatively big things as he swiftly climbed the ladder of success in the home of Potifar, securing a position of leadership amongst the household. However, once again his position of the favored one was stripped away from him and he again found himself rotting in a 'pit', awaiting his salvation.

With these life changing experiences came with them a truly valuable lesson.

While we can and must constantly endeavor to do our utmost to succeed in all areas of life, we are ultimately not in complete control of our destiny. Our efforts and abilities can only take us so far and we must rely on Hashem to take us over the line. With this understanding of life comes an even more powerful realization. Rav Noach Weinberg zt"l is often cited as saying, "If you trust/believe in Hashem, you can do everything." When we attribute our success, wealth, power and strength as gifts from God then we realize that we are all on a level playing field. There is no room for arrogance as our successes can be whipped away faster than we achieved them. Conversely we see that, as the Chofetz Chaim noted, salvation can come 'in the blink of an eye'. Yosef was acutely aware that Hashem was in control of not only his life but the whole world. This awareness gave him the courage, bravery and inner strength to act and speak with clarity and assured purpose before Paro. Yosef realized that he was only human, but if you trust Hashem, you can do anything. He knew that although he was just a servant, a prisoner, a 'nobody', nevertheless, Hashem is running the show. Yosef reasoned, if Hashem placed me, in this specific scenario, at this specific moment, it is because He believes in me and He knows that I can do it.

Many times, we view ourselves as nobodies; we do not see ourselves worthy of much, if anything at all. Especially in today's social media infused society, where perfection is portrayed at every opportunity we must heed the example of Yosef that even at the lowest points in our life "If you trust/believe in Hashem, you can

do everything”. One of the positive talking points which has been raised many times since the onset of this pandemic is that it does not discriminate. It doesn't matter who you are, your position in society or your level of wealth, we have all been affected by the rampage of Covid-19. From a Jewish perspective, this has been a stark reminder that ultimately Hashem continues to run the world and we therefore must embrace this reminder to fortify our *emunah* and belief. Armed with this belief we can each achieve greatness in our own way as we strive to reach our unique God given potential.

Shabbat Shalom