

Parashat Miketz – Shabbat Chanukah, 5779, 2018:

“Not I, Hashem Will Give an Answer”

Rabbi David Etengoff

Dedicated to the sacred memories of my mother, Miriam Tovah bat Aharon Hakohen, father-in-law, Levi ben Yitzhak, sister-in-law, Ruchama Rivka Sondra bat Yechiel, sister, Shulamit bat Menachem, Yehonatan Binyamin ben Mordechai Meir Halevi, Shoshana Elka bat Avraham, the *Kedoshim* of Har Nof and Pittsburgh, and the *refuah shlaimah* of Yakir Ephraim ben Rachel Devorah, Mordechai ben Miriam Tovah, and the safety of our brothers and sisters in Israel and around the world.

Last week's *parasha* concludes with the story of Yosef's undeserved imprisonment in an Egyptian dungeon based upon Potiphar's wife's false accusations. While incarcerated, Yosef rises to the top of the dungeon hierarchy and analyzes the dreams of two of his fellow prisoners – Pharaoh's chief baker and chief cupbearer. Based upon his *ruach hakodesh* (prophetic insight), Yosef realizes that the chief cupbearer will be returned to his former position of honor and prestige, and most likely will be able to influence Pharaoh on his behalf. He therefore asks him: “But remember me (*zikartani*) when things go well with you, and please do me a favor and mention me (*v'hizkartani*) to Pharaoh, and you will get me out of this house.” (*Sefer Bereishit* 40:14, this and all Bible translations, *The Judaica Press complete Tanach*)

While Yosef's strategy seemed to guarantee success, this is not how matters initially proceeded: “[Pharaoh] restored the chief cupbearer to his [position as] cupbearer, and he placed the cup on Pharaoh's palm... But the chief cupbearer did not remember Yosef, and he forgot him.” (40:21, 23) When we fast forward to our *parasha*, we encounter a situation wherein none of Pharaoh's wise men were able to effectively interpret his very disturbing dreams. This becomes the impetus for the chief cupbearer to finally remember Yosef, the

dream analyst, and bring him to the regent's attention. Not too surprisingly, the perplexed king quickly takes advantage of this new-found opportunity:

So Pharaoh sent and called Joseph, and they rushed him from the dungeon, and he shaved and changed his clothes, and he [then] came to Pharaoh. And Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I have dreamed a dream, and there is no interpreter for it, but I have heard it said of you [that] you understand a dream, to interpret it." And Joseph replied to Pharaoh, saying, "Not I; G-d will give an answer [that will bring] peace to Pharaoh." (*Sefer Bereishit* 41:14-16)

Allow me to expand upon our passage: Yosef was summoned from his dungeon of despair and brought before Pharaoh, the most powerful man on the planet. Almost immediately, the monarch told him that he had heard Yosef was capable of accurately interpreting dreams. Let us pause for a moment and imagine how many of us would have responded to such a seemingly omnipotent ruler. Assuming that we had Yosef's talent, most of us probably would have said some variation of the following: "Yes, I can interpret dreams very well. In fact, your majesty, I haven't been wrong yet! I do have an amazing gift that is now at your service. What did Pharaoh dream? Allow me to interpret the dream's meaning."

Yosef, however, chose a very different approach and, in so doing, took the final step toward becoming *Yosef Hatzadik* (Yosef the Righteous): "*Bil'adai, Elokim ya'aneh et shalom Pharaoh*" ("It is not through my wisdom [Onkelos] that I shall interpret your dreams, G-d will provide an answer that will bring peace to Pharaoh"). The singular import of these six Hebrew words cannot be overestimated. They created a chain of events that established Yosef as the key figure who enabled the Jewish people to initially thrive in Egypt, and subsequently survive the Egyptian exile.

Why does the phrase, “*Bil’adai, Elokim ya’aneh et shalom Pharaoh,*” have such manifest power? We are fortunate that the Malbim (Rabbi Meir Leibush ben Yechiel Michel, 1809-1879), in his *Commentary on the Torah* on our verse, provides us with an answer to this question:

[When Yosef declared this phrase, he was actually telling the king that] the dream was a communication of Divine Providence from Hashem. Moreover, just as Hashem sent you [Pharaoh] this communication to make known to you your peace [i.e. your future] ... so, too, will He make known its interpretation to the dream analyst no matter who he may be. In addition, even if the [interpretation] of this [Heavenly] message will not come from me, nonetheless, others will be able to interpret it, for even without me, certainly Hashem Himself will provide an answer to Pharaoh that will bring you peace... (Translation, underlining and brackets my own)

A careful reading of the Malbim’s words leads to an inescapable and seemingly counter-intuitive conclusion: Yosef achieved his ultimate greatness precisely because he took himself, and any agenda of self-aggrandizement, completely out of the picture. Instead, Yosef declared that everything that takes place is completely dependent upon the Almighty, and never upon an individual — no matter who he or she may be.

May we strive to be like *Yosef Hatzadik*, and ever be aware of Hashem as the Creator and Ruler of the Universe, as found in the words of *Dovid HaMelech* (King David): “*M’ate Hashem hiyitah zot he niflot b’aineynu*” – “This was from the L-rd; it is wondrous in our eyes” (*Sefer Tehillim* 118:23). May this time come soon and in our days, *v’chane yihi ratzon*.

Shabbat Shalom and Chanukah Sameach!

Past *drashot* may be found at my blog-website: <http://reparashathashavuah.org>

They may also be found on <http://www.yutorah.org/> using the search criteria of Etengoff and the parasha's name.

The email list, *b'chasdei Hashem*, has expanded to hundreds of people. I am always happy to add more members to the list. If you have family or friends you would like to have added, please do not hesitate to contact me via email <mailto:rdbe718@gmail.com>.

*** My audio *shiurim* for Women on the topics of *Tefilah* and *Tanach* may be found at: <http://tinyurl.com/8hsdpvd>

*** I have posted 164 of [Rabbi Soloveitchik's](#) English language audio *shiurim* (MP3 format) spanning the years 1958-1984. Please click on the highlighted link.