

תורת אביגדור

הגאון ר' אביגדור מיללער זצ"ל

Rav Avigdor Miller on Parshas Mikeitz

Adapted from his Tapes, Seforim and Writings of Talmidim

This Week
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Rav Avigdor Miller ztz"l on

פרשת מקץ

THE LIGHT AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL GOES DARK

When we left off at the conclusion of last week's parsha, Yosef was quickly nearing the light at the end of the dark tunnel of his long stay in prison. After having languished there for ten years, and for a crime he didn't commit nonetheless, Yosef could already taste the sweet taste of freedom. His fellow prisoner, a friend and cell mate, was going to be reinstated to his former glory as the cupbearer of פרעה. And there was no better connection, no better protectzia than this. The שר המשקים for whom he had just interpreted a dream לטובה, would have the ear of פרעה, and had given his commitment to Yosef to speak to פרעה on his behalf.

And then everything stops. A deafening silence! Between פרשת וישב and פרשת מקץ there is nothing for two long years. For two long years Yosef is sitting in prison and waiting. And waiting. Here he had believed that he was standing on the verge of

attaining his freedom, and yet he hears nothing. Silence. Just day after day of bitter disappointment.

YOSEF IN THE PALACE

And suddenly, as our parsha begins, we are standing with the **שר המשקים** in the palace of the king. **פרעה** is frantically gathering together his advisors as he searches for the correct interpretation to a set of dreams that is troubling him greatly. And then, the **שר המשקים** remembers his old prison acquaintance, the friendly man who had always lifted his spirits, and who had proved himself more than capable of interpreting dreams. And so he quickly tells **פרעה**, about the **עבד עברי** in prison who might be able to help. And within no time at all we are being told of the climax of Yosef's career. Yosef is standing before **פרעה** about to be crowned vice-regent of all of Egypt.

MIKEITZ: THE END OF WHAT?

Now, we must study the words that the Torah uses to introduce the story of Yosef attaining his freedom: **ויהי מקץ שנתיים** - "And it was at the end of two years" (Bereishis 41:1). The words **מקץ**, "And it was at the end of," are somewhat conspicuous for those who are familiar with **לשון קודש**. A more appropriate, and more familiar terminology would have been **ויהי אחרי שני שנים**, "And it was after two years." However, the choice of the word **מקץ**, is meant to imply "the culmination," "the end" of a certain period of time, the end of a specific event.

And we cannot entertain the idea that the possuk is referring to the "the end" of his years in prison, because Yosef spent ten years before these last two years in the same prison. So why are these two years any more special than than the first ten?

And it is that question that the well-known Medrash is answering: **על ידי שאמר לשר המשקים 'זכרתני וזכרתני' נתוסף לו**

שתי שנים שנאמר ויהי מקץ - Because Yosef said to the cupbearer of Pharaoh, 'Remember me,' and 'Mention me,' Hashem added on two years to his internment in prison" (Bereishis Rabbah 89:1).

After helping the שר המשקים by interpreting his dream for him, Yosef made the following request ועשית כי אם זכרתני אתך... "If only you will remember me...and you will please do me this kindness and mention me to פרעה, and you shall take me out of this house of prison" (Bereishis 40:14).

The Medrash here is telling us that Yosef was punished with having to spend an extra two years in prison because of this error of relying on a בשר ודם, on a human being. Yosef turned to the שר המשקים, and asked him for his help. This lack of בטחון, the lack of faith in Hashem, that his request of the שר המשקים revealed, needed to be purified with another two years of languishing in prison. And therefore, מקץ שנתיים ימים, at the end of two years, refers to the end of this period of two extra years that Yosef was forced to spend in prison.

THE DROWNING TZADIK

However, this Medrash, instead of answering and clarifying, has really only muddied our understanding. Are we really to believe that Yosef was mistaken for taking advantage of this opportune moment to achieve his freedom?

Here you have a tzadik, walking alongside the river, and along comes a strong wind and pushes him into the river. So now he's struggling to escape the raging river and he sees a gentile in a fishing boat. So this tzadik is not supposed to call out for help?! He should have bitachon, he should have faith in Hashem, and keep drowning?! And if he thinks he can swim to the bank of the river, or grab onto a log floating by, he shouldn't do so?! Certainly

he should cry out, and swim, and grab onto anything he can. Certainly! No question about it.

And Yosef too, was drowning in the raging river of this Egyptian prison for ten years already. Ten years! And he wasn't going to get out anytime soon. He was never going to get out. This is before the liberals came to power and ruined society. This is long before the wicked liberal lawyers - and they're Jewish by the way, most of the wicked liberals are wicked Jews - this is long before the days when the wicked lawyers would defend the criminals and make sure to get them out of prison and back roaming the streets looking for their next victim.

So Yosef was going to languish in that prison for a long time, probably forever. And so, certainly Yosef was justified in attempting to use any opportunity to achieve his freedom. And what would be a better opportunity than this one? The **שר המשקים** would soon be restored to his position in the palace, in fulfillment of Yosef's interpretation. And he would once again have the ear of his master, **פרעה**, and he could easily whisper into his ear: "My majesty, I want you to know that there's a man in prison, a fine young man, and capable as well. And he's innocent. Maybe you could do something for him?"

WHAT WAS THE CRIME OF YOSEF?

And therefore, we come back to step one. What was the terrible crime of Yosef? What did this poor man do already? What does it mean that he was punished with an extra two years in prison because of his rational - more than rational, his necessary - attempt to achieve his freedom? And with that we begin our subject for tonight.

Now pay attention. The **מדרש** describes Yosef's release from prison with the words of a possuk in Iyov: **קץ שם לחושך אבן** - "אופל ועלמות" - "[Hashem] put an end to [Yosef's] darkness, an end

to the stone of darkness, and to the shadow of death" (Iyov 28:3). The terms "darkness" and "shadow of death" we can easily understand. Being stuck in prison in מצרים, in a dark underground pit, is most definitely darkness. And it was the "shadow of death" because Yosef would be there forever. There was no hope of ever getting out, and Yosef would be there till the day he died.

But what does it mean אבן אופל, "the stone of darkness." What is a stone doing here? מאן דכר שמיה? And what does it mean that finally, after two years of Yosef sitting in prison, that there was no more אבן אופל, no more "stone of darkness"?

SEVEN NAMES OF THE YETZER HARAH

So we turn to Chazal to help us make sense of this enigmatic term. The Gemara in Sukkah (52a) tells us that there are seven names for the יצר הרע, seven different concepts that are included in the wiles and the power of the evil inclination. And each one of them is important to understand. We spoke about this here at length once. If you want to know more about these names of the יצר הרע, you can listen to the tape "The Seven Names of the Yetzer Harah" (Tape # E-119).

DOING WITHOUT THINKING: THE STONY HEART

Now, one of the names of the yetzer harah is אבן, stone. Why is it called a stone? Listen well. Stone means that a person has a mind that is not thinking; it's stagnant, not functioning as it should. His mind is a דומם, like a stone. One of the ways that the יצר הרע works is that it causes you to get excited about something, and because of the rush of excitement, the rush of emotion, you don't think. You don't get your mind involved. You just react, and your mind remains a stone, not thinking. And that's when you make the wrong choice. Had you had the time to think

things through with a calm mind, you would never had made that choice. Only that you weren't thinking; you were just reacting.

Here's a man who already was מקיים the mitzvah of eating a doughnut on the first night of Chanukah. And he was even מחמיר and had a second. And when he sees a leftover doughnut on the table, his תאוה, his desire, is tickled. Now, if he would think for a moment, if he didn't have a mind that was stone, he would think about all the sugar and other garbage in that doughnut that he doesn't need. He would think about how he'll be running to the bathroom all night. But he doesn't. His mind remains lifeless, and instead he reacts to his emotions, his excitement, and he devours it. And then he quickly wipes the custard off his lips when he hears his wife coming down the steps.

And so, the most salient feature of the יצר הרע when it's described as "stony" is that it deprives a person of any thought. It causes a person not to be conscious of the issues involved. When a person has a לב האבן, a stony mind, that means he is not putting his mind to work. And that's why people will take step after step, and go through life, but they're just doing, reacting, living by habit, with a lack of feeling for the real issues at hand. They're not thinking and therefore they are missing out on the great purpose of life - using your mind in the service of Hashem.

PLAYING DREIDEL AND THANKING HASHEM

Here's a man who comes home from work, tired and hungry. And he has to light the Chanukah candles. Of course, he's going to sing הנרות הללו and מעוז צור with his family. And he'll make sure to eat some latkes, and play dreidel with his children. This man does everything! But because of his stony heart, he does nothing.

Let me explain what I mean by nothing. The singular most important reason why we celebrate Chanukah is to remember the ניסים that Hashem performed on behalf of the Jewish people, and to arouse within us a feeling of דעת השם, real tangible awareness of Him. It says וקבעו שמונת ימי חנוכה אלו להודות ולהלל. It doesn't say that the חכמים established Chanuka to eat latkes and play dreidel. Nothing wrong, but that's not what you should be thinking about. Only להודות ולהלל, to thank and to praise Hashem. That's all! Gratitude to Him for the great הצלה he displayed on our behalf. And even more so, gratitude for the extra dose of awareness of Him that the ניסים provided us with. ולך עשית שם גדול וקדוש בעולמך. That's the real עבודה of Chanukah; expressing gratitude.

A MIND AS DEAD AS A DOORNAIL

But this man, because he doesn't focus his mind on making progress in life, his mind is a דומם, and all of his עבודה is almost nothing - nothing compared to what could have been had he applied his mind to it. This man is missing the real issues at hand. The יצר הרע is working on this man - and he's doing a fine job at it - giving this man a mind of stone. A mind that's as dead as a doornail.

YOSEF GRABS ONTO THE LOG

And with that we come back to Yosef. Yosef wanted to get out of prison; and why wouldn't he? And now, as the שר המשקים was about to be released from prison, Yosef had before him an opportune moment for השתדלות. And so, he leaped at the wonderful opportunity. And of course, Yosef did exactly what he was supposed to do. Like the tzadik drowning in the raging river, who would be punished in the Next World for not grabbing onto the life-preserver, it was most appropriate for Yosef to grab onto this life-preserver of the שר המשקים.

However, Hashem called that a "stony heart" on the part of Yosef. Not being entirely conscious of his every thought, of his every feeling, was for Yosef a great flaw in his perfection. To make plans, and to act on helping yourself, even when most appropriate, must never be devoid of thoughts of Hakodosh Boruch Hu. When one recognizes that the outcome of everything that he does, everything that he attempts, is completely in the hands of Hakodosh Boruch Hu, then he is always turning to Him in supplication. Hashem is always on his mind, because everything depends only on Him. Every time you cross the street, you need Hashem to get you to the other side. Every customer that comes into the store, you need Hashem to make that sale. Every effort you make, in every single area of your life, should always be infused with Hakodosh Boruch Hu.

YOSEF HA'TZADIK: THE MAN OF LITTLE FAITH

Now, when Yosef spoke to the **שר המשקים**, he spoke to him with the hope that he could help. Yosef was trusting in a human being! Now, I'm sure that Yosef was relying on Hashem, but nonetheless Hashem detected a slight flaw in Yosef's mind. It was a lack of thought. A lack of recognition that the **שר המשקים** would, at best, simply be a tool in the hands of Hakodosh Boruch Hu. The **שר המשקים** was nothing, nothing at all! And while Yosef surely had to do whatever he could to achieve his freedom, the **אבן אופל**, the stony mind, causes one to take action without having Hakodosh Boruch Hu in the forefront of his mind. And that is the yetzer harah that must be battled at all times.

PRISON FIXES THE FLAW

And now we come to the two extra years in prison that Yosef had to endure. Do not for a moment believe that this was a punishment. No, no, that's a misunderstanding. And in order gain the proper **דעת** from the stories in the Torah, one must have a proper understanding of what the Torah is teaching us. So let's

turn to the wise words of דוד המלך, and help ourselves get a proper understanding of the purpose of these two additional years.

In Tehillim, דוד המלך compares Yosef's last two years in prison to the furnace of the one who smelts precious metals. You know that when an expert smelter refines gold, he puts the gold to cook over a hot fire. And as the gold melts, some of the dross separates from the gold, and the gold is now more pure. But if this smelter wants to refine the gold even more, if he wants to create an even more pure piece of gold, he won't settle for that one smelting. He'll do it again; he'll boil up the water and cook the gold again. And then some more dross separates from the gold. And the more pure the man wants his gold to be, the more times he'll put it over the fire. Sometimes it might take two years, let's say, to refine the gold to perfection.

And that's how דוד המלך explains Yosef's two extra years in prison: לעבד נמכר יוסף ענו בכבל רגלו ברזל באה נפשו...אמרת - "Yosef was sold as a slave. Hashem afflicted his feet with chains, and he came into iron fetters...The command of Hashem [to remain in prison] purified him." Now, the word צרפתהו, purified, is the same word that is used for the purification of gold. Hashem was purifying Yosef in prison. And then, דוד continues, after the צירוף, when the purification process came to an end after two years, only then שלח מלך ויתירהו - "He sent a king who loosened him" (Tehillim 105:17-20).

YOSEF BECOMES PERFECT

Hashem needed Yosef to be absolutely pure in his faith. And under His very exacting magnifying glass, He saw that Yosef possessed a certain amount of trust in a human being. Now, if we would have been there, we would have seen nothing wrong at all.

At all! We would have seen a tzadik, a righteous man, fulfilling the mitzvos of **ושמרתם את נפשותיכם** and **וחי בהם**. And not only in a superficial sense. There is no doubt that Yosef was constantly aware of Hashem. But Yosef had to be absolutely perfect in his complete reliance on Hashem, before he could become the **מושל** **בכל ארץ מצרים**, and more important, before becoming the leader of the **עם ישראל** for the next seventy years.

DISAPPOINTMENT MAKES YOU PERFECT

Hashem wanted Yosef to be as perfect as humanly possible, as reliant on Him as a human being living in this world could be. There could not remain even one little flaw, even in a minute manner. He could not even have a little bitachon in human beings. And therefore, before Yosef could go onto greatness, that little flaw had to be polished. And what would accomplish that polishing of the flaw of reliance on man? Disappointment in man! Disappointment in his own capabilities, and disappointment in the power of others to help him as well.

Yosef had put some trust in a human being, and it would take two years of disappointment, two years of unrequited trust in a human promise, to purify Yosef from his reliance on man, be it himself or others.

You should know, that it wasn't an accident that the **שר המשקים** forgot for two years to let **פרעה** know of his good old friend in prison. It wasn't an accident at all. And the words of the Torah even suggest that Hashem made the **שר המשקים** forget. **ולא זכר... וישכחו**. Because on his own, he might have remembered. Why not?! Yosef was a help to him, and he was grateful for that. But Hashem made him forget because Hashem wanted to refine Yosef like a smelter refines gold in a hot furnace.

After the **שר המשקים** was freed, Yosef waited eagerly for his freedom to arrive. "Maybe today," Yosef," Yosef thought. And when the disappointment came, he said, "Maybe tomorrow." And when a full week came to an end, "Next week for sure," Yosef thought. And he waited and waited. And with each passing day, with every slight pang of disappointment, a little more of the impurity was removed.

But Yosef still held out some hope. He told himself that it was useless to trust in a man of flesh and blood, but in the most inner recesses of his mind, there was still some stone that had to be softened. He still held out some hope, he still waited for the knock on his cell-door, for the expected message from the palace.

Day after day Yosef would wait for the warden to come in and announce that he was being freed by the order of the king himself. And as each day passed, Yosef became more and more reliant on Hashem. And as the weeks and months passed, Yosef certainly utilized his time in reflecting on the unreliability of men. And there is no doubt that Yosef would address his entreaties to Hakodosh Boruch Hu with more and more earnestness each day, as each passing day brought forth a more intense recognition of the futility of relying on man. Until two years had passed; and now, because of the culmination of the many disappointments, Yosef relied only on Hashem. He was totally pure. And now he was prepared for his future; his future in this world and the next. Yosef had become a **בעל בטחון**, a person who relies solely on Hashem.

THE STORY OF OUR LIVES

And that is the story of our lives as well. Except that, unlike Yosef, we are not using the great opportunity of disappointment to become more and more perfect in our reliance on Hashem as the sole source of everything in this world. When

we are faced with disappointment in our lives, when our own plans go awry, or when the people and things we trusted in are not successful, we often fail to take advantage of the opportunity for perfection. You might make an excuse; "Look, not everything can work out all the time," and you move on from it. Or you might wrack your brain for excuses, "It didn't work because of this or because of that." And it's a great opportunity that goes lost. Yosef could have also made excuses as well. "I'm sure that the **שר המשקים** got caught up in his work in the palace and forgot about me for now. It's only natural for him to be extra careful with his work. He had a pretty bad experience the last time he made a mistake with the drink of **פרעה**." And had Yosef made those excuses for the disappointment, he would have failed to glean the true lesson of the disappointment.

And even if you're a tzadik and you say **גם זו לטובה**, "it's all for the best," even that is only a faint accomplishment, a tiny step towards the greatness that you are capable of squeezing out of disappointed hopes and frustrated plans.

YOU'RE NOT THE "MACHER"

A man asked me yesterday, "When things don't go the way I planned, how do I avoid getting angry?" Here's a man who did whatever he could to accomplish his goal. He wasn't lazy, he wasn't negligent in his duties, and still it didn't go like he planned. And now he wants to know how to deal with the resulting disappointment.

So listen to me. The **שער הביטחון** in **חובות הלבבות** says that Hashem will sometimes do that to you to teach you a lesson. Sometimes Hashem chooses to teach you the important lesson that you are not the one who is the author of your fate. To let you know that He's in charge. So although you made a certain arrangement, and you planned, and you hoped that it would turn

out a certain way, Hakodosh Boruch Hu is teaching you a very valuable lesson. The lesson that "I am the מֶלֶךְ. I am the King. I am in charge, not you." Hashem is telling you, "Don't rely on your plans. And don't rely on other people. Don't rely on other things. It's all Me!"

FAILURE: A PRICELESS LESSON

And therefore, disappointment in foiled plans, disappointment in upset arrangements, is actually a lesson for eternity. So instead of being disappointed, you should say, "I thank You, Hashem, for that lesson. Thank you for reminding me again, for teaching me, that you're the מֶלֶךְ and not me." It's worth money, that lesson. Really you should have to pay good money for it. A lesson in perfection of the mind is priceless.

Because otherwise, you think that you're the boss. You think that you're the one running the show here. You're the מאכער here, you think. So Hakodosh Boruch Hu says, "No, no. You're not the מאכער at all. I'm the only מאכער here."

And that's why things turn out the wrong way; not the way you planned. Hashem is purifying you like he purified Yosef Ha'tzadik. He's teaching you, "I'm the One and only מאכער. You have to rely on Me and only Me." So you're getting a free lesson in perfection of the mind. Hashem is not charging you for it, so you should be happy.

PRICELESS LESSONS ALL DAY LONG

And Hashem is constantly providing you with these lessons in perfection of character. Because no matter how much you plan, no matter how much you do to make sure things work out, you will still always suffer disappointments. But the person who is willing to work on himself, if he's willing to put effort into using his mind at all times, will be able to turn those disappointments into achievement. And that's the achievement of

ridding himself of the **אבן האופל**, the stony heart that doesn't think - the lazy mind that prevents all good accomplishment. It took two years of pangs of disappointment day after day, to purify the mind of Yosef, to remove all the dross. But Yosef purified himself, only because he was willing to convert every pang of disappointment in man, into the achievement of reliance on Hashem.

And that's exactly what we are supposed to be doing with the many disappointments, big and small, that we all face throughout our lives. Instead of just moving forward - overlooking the disappointments and going on with your life - every dashed hope, every plan gone awry is an opportunity for perfection in trust in Hashem.

A MISSED APPOINTMENT

Here's a man who has to be at his appointment at 9 o'clock sharp. And he takes all the precautions necessary to make sure that he gets there early. Whether he's relying on himself or others, there's no difference. He'll leave on time, he'll plan his route in advance. Or he'll make sure to order a responsible taxi, a responsible driver. And then the unexpected happens. Extra traffic on the road. A mistake in directions. Whatever it is. And now he missed his appointment. And that's the great opportunity for perfection that we've been speaking about.

He should turn to Hashem and say - don't think it, say it - "Thank you Hashem for this lesson. Thank you Hashem for teaching me that I'm not the master of my own fate. Thank You Hashem for teaching me that You are the **מאכער**. Not me, and not anybody else."

SMALL DISAPPOINTMENTS ALL DAY LONG

And a person can do this tens of times every day. Many tens of times. Because all day long there are things that don't go exactly as you expected. And every small disappointment is the opportunity for turning to Hashem and saying, "I'm learning this lesson again, that You're the boss. Only You."

That is what the **חובות הלבבות** means when he says, "If something happens in an unexpected manner, take it as a message from Hashem that you should trust only in Him, and not in the things that you expected to give you success" (Sha'ar Avodas Elokim #8). That is why Hakodosh Boruch Hu manipulates things to sometimes not work out for you. To teach us the great lesson that He is in charge.

DON'T WAIT FOR THE TRAGEDY TO COME

And only a fool will wait for the more traumatic events in his life to learn this lesson. Nobody should wait **חס ושלום** for the great disappointment of the man, the expert scribe, who relied on his hand for his parnasa. And then, when his hand was cut off in a terrible accident, it was that disastrous disappointment that taught him this lesson, that Hashem is the **מאבנער**, the One who provides parnasa, not his hand (Sha'ar Habitachon Gate 4: Chapter 7). The wise person takes the most minute disappointments in his day: the missed green light, the burnt supper, walking up the steps and forgetting what he was looking for, and he stops his life to think for a moment. To think like Yosef

did. "Why did Hashem disappoint me? To teach me this important lesson that I am nothing and that He is everything." And then he turns to Hashem and says, "Thank you Hashem for this priceless lesson. Thank you for teaching me that You are in charge. And that in You, and only You, should I put my trust."

BECOME AS PERFECT AS YOSEF

And if you do that, you're following in the footsteps of Yosef Ha'tzadik, who understood that every step in his life was the result of Hashem's plans for him. For the sake of Yosef's perfection, Hashem was kind enough to bestow upon him disappointment after disappointment, and this teaching him the lesson that even when one makes the proper and necessary attempts, he must always know that it is solely the will of Hashem that will help him. Yosef knew how to make use of disappointment, and therefore **אמרת השם צרפתהו** "the word of Hashem [to remain for two years in prison] purified him." And the one who is willing to learn the lesson of disappointment provided by Hashem, will also purify his mind and prepare himself for the Next World when the truth of Hashem's full control in this world will be evident to all.

Have a wonderful Shabbos.

תורת אביגדור

"שאל אביך ויגדך זקניך ויאמרו לך"



Q&A With Rav Avigdor Miller Ztz"l

Q: How could the Rav say that גלות מצרים was meant to purify our nation if there was such a big danger of assimilation?

A: That's exactly it! That's what purified us. Fighting back against the influences of the outside world of sheker is what makes you great. That's what purifies you.

They began their stay in Mitzraim by training themselves under the direction of Yosef Ha'tzadik in how to fight back against assimilation. When Pharaoh called in Yosef's brothers for the purpose of giving them big positions in the government, Yosef warned his brothers. Say, "We are just plain shepherds." *"Ro'ei tzon avodecha, gam anachnu, gam avoseinu"* (Bereishis 47-3). "We are nothing but shepherds. We are not fit for any big position."

Now, the brothers desired to get good positions. They would welcome any promotion that Pharaoh would give them. But Yosef warned them, "Nothing doing!" And throughout his whole life, Yosef kept on warning his brothers and the whole family, "Do not become assimilated with the people of Mitzraim. Do not let your ideals become assimilated with the ideals of Mitzraim. Don't mingle with them. Maintain your Hebrew names. Speak your own language. Everything should be according to the way our Avos lived."

And that struggle, that audacity, to remain separate was a tremendous achievement. That was the success. That was the preparation for the battle against assimilation. And that was what saved them and that's why they eventually were taken out of Mitzraim. So it was Yosef, who demanded that separation, that aloofness, from the ways of the Mitzrim, who deserves the credit for training the Am Yisroel to be deserving of Yetzias Mitzraim

TAPE #E-214

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