

# INTEGRITY PERSONIFIED

*by Rabbi Daniel Travis*

*"Yosef collected all the money in Egypt in payment for the food that people were buying. Yosef brought all the money to Pharaoh's treasury." (Bereshith 47:14)*

In order to highlight Yosef's honesty and reliability, the Torah describes the business practices Yosef employed when he was overseeing the distribution of food in Egypt.<sup>1</sup> During the years of famine, Yosef did not so much as taste a slice of bread each day until all those who had come to him for provisions had received their food.<sup>2</sup> He also did not allow his hard work to justify taking money that did not belong to him. Since Pharaoh had placed his trust in Yosef, Yosef would not keep any of Pharaoh's money for himself; rather he bought all the money to Pharaoh. Pharaoh was well aware of Yosef's extraordinary honesty, and recognized that Yosef would not take anything at all that was not rightfully his. When Yaakov and his family came down to Egypt to live, Pharaoh knew that Yosef would not take property without his consent. Only after Pharaoh had explicitly commanded him to do so, did Yosef appropriate land for his family in Egypt.<sup>3</sup>

Yosef was rewarded during his lifetime for his integrity. "If you see a man who is diligent in his work - he shall stand before kings."<sup>4</sup> This verse applies to Yosef, who worked faithfully for his master Potiphar. Because of his faithful service, God arranged events so that Pharaoh himself freed Yosef from his captivity,<sup>5</sup> and appointed him Prime Minister of Egypt. <sup>6</sup>

Yosef's integrity continued to bring him respect even after his death. When his remains were brought through the wilderness, his coffin was carried alongside the Ark of the Covenant containing the tablets upon which the Ten Commandments were inscribed. When asked what Yosef had done to deserve such great honor, Moshe Rabbeinu replied, "This person [Yosef] fulfilled that which is contained in this Ark [i.e., 'You shall not steal'], as the verse states, 'Yosef brought all the money to Pharaoh's treasury.'" <sup>7</sup>

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1. *Ramban on Bereshith 47:14.*

2. Midrash cited in Ma'ayana Shel Torah p. 184.

3. Bereshith 45:19.

4. Mishlei 22:29.

5. Bereshith 41:14.

6. Shir HaShirim Rabbah 1:1.

7. Mechilta, beginning of Parshath Beshalach.

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