

PRISONER OF UNCONSCIOUS

by Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Near the end of this week's parsha, the Torah tells how Yoseph is falsely accused of adultery and is sent to prison. During Yoseph's detention "Hashem was with Yoseph, He was endowed with charm and had much favor in the eyes of the warden. In fact, the warden placed all the other prisoners in Yoseph's custody and Yoseph was in charge of all their duties. The warden trusted everything that Yoseph did and, everything that Yoseph discharged was successful" (Genesis 39:21-23).

In addition to the Divine Providence that cloaked Yoseph, another striking incident occurred. Back at Pharaoh's palace, the king's was served wine with an insect floating in it, and a foreign substance was baked into Pharaoh's bread. The baker and butler were both jailed for those breaches, and were placed in Yoseph's charge. After a year in prison, theu both dreamt a strange dream. Yoseph, Divinely ordained, interpreted each dream in amazingly accurate fashion. He predicted that the baker would be executed for his infraction while the wine steward would be returned to his former position and stature. Yoseph, convinced at the power of his predictions, did not stop with mere interpretations. He implored the wine steward to discuss his own plight with Pharaoh. "If only you would think of me when Pharaoh benefits you, and mention me to Pharaoh, then you will get me out of here," pleaded Yoseph (Genesis 40:14). Yoseph erred. The wine-steward completely ignored Yoseph's requests and left him to languish in prison for another two years. In fact, upon mentioning Yoseph to Pharaoh, the butler even referred to him in a very disparaging manner.

The midrash explains that this response, or lack thereof, was a heavenly punishment. Yoseph should not have urged a mortal man to be the vehicle of his release. He should have rather placed more faith in Hashem. Many commentaries are bothered by this midrash. They ask, "is it not one's duty to employ the help of others? Why should Yoseph have relied solely on Hashem? What is wrong with asking for help from below instead of relying solely on the One Above?

My grandfather, Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetzky, of blessed memory, had a keen sense of direction, not only in spiritual life, but on the mundane streets of the city as well. He was once in a car together with a colleague, a Rosh Yeshiva (dean) of a prestigious Yeshiva. That particular Rosh Yeshiva was a nervous individual and panicked when the driver, a student of his, lost his way in an area of the city that was not accustomed to welcoming rabbis with open arms. The young man wanted desperately to get back on the highway. "Please," pleaded the Rosh Yeshiva of his student, "freg a politzmahn (ask a policeman)!"

Reb Yaakov interrupted. "You needn't ask. I know the way." Reb Yaakov turned his attention to the

driver. "Continue for two blocks, make a left. After the first light, you make another left. Make an immediate right and you will see the entrance to the highway that we need."

Reb Yaakov's colleague was not convinced. "Please," he insisted of the driver, "ask a policeman!" The student felt obliged to listen to his Rosh Yeshiva, and spotted a police car on the other side of the street, two blocks away. Quickly he made a U-turn, drove the two blocks, and stopped the officer. "Excuse me, officer, asked the nervous driver, "how do you get back on the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway?"

The officer saw the two sages in the back seat of the car and realized the severity of the situation. He began to explain the directions. "First of all, turn back around and go four blocks. Then make a left. After the first light, you make another left. Make an immediate right and you will see the entrance to the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway."

My grandfather turned to his colleague and smiled. "Nu, my friend," whispered Reb Yaakov, "now that a stranger said it, do you feel better?"

Rabbi Moshe Feinstein (who incidentally was not the other Rosh Yeshiva) explains that there are two types of individuals. There are those who have no heavenly signs, and the thought of Hashem is quite distant from them. Then there are those whose every action is blessed with the guidance of a spiritual force. It is almost as if Hashem is walking hand in hand with them or even as if Hashem is sitting next to them. Yoseph should have realized that the events that transpired in the prison cell were supernaturally divine. Within one year of entering prison, he is charged with the welfare of every prisoner. Then, two Egyptian stewards were sent to be with him, and each had a dream that Yoseph, divinely inspired, interpreted in prophetic fashion. At that point, Yoseph should have understood that his freedom was imminent. Hashem, through His own mysterious yet miraculous ways would surely get him out of jail. The wine-steward was extremely impressed when Yoseph's interpretation proved correct. Yoseph did not have to implore the steward twice with requests for mercy.

When G-d is driving, there is no need to ask for directions.

Dedicated in memory of Joseph Jungreis -- Reb Yoel Zvi ben Reb Tuvia HaLevi
By Joel & Marilyn Mandel
Good Shabbos!

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