

# **DON'T FORGET THE BUTLER**

*by Shlomo Katz*

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**Miketz**

Maharal asks: Why did Chazal see fit to establish a new holiday (Chanukah) to thank Hashem for our being able to light the menorah in the Bet Hamikdash? We can understand a holiday to thank Hashem for our personal salvation, but the mitzvot are performed for Him, so-to-speak. Why should we thank Hashem for letting us perform them?

The essence of the war between the Jews and the Greco-Syrians, Maharal explains, was a spiritual battle between Greek wisdom and the Torah. The Greeks sought to establish that their wisdom and their way of life were supreme. The Torah was the competitor to their wisdom, and this required them to try and distance us from the Torah.

The world was created on the condition that the Jews receive the Torah. Had the Greeks succeeded in uprooting the Torah, the entire world literally would have come to an end. Thus, the fact that a miracle occurred and the Jews were able to perform a mitzvah signifies the victory of the Torah over Greek wisdom, and therefore signifies that the Jews, and the world, would continue to exist. This, surely, is a reason to thank Hashem.

Alternatively, Chanukah actually commemorates the military victory of the Jews over the Greeks. However, the Jews were not sure whether their victory really was a miracle; after all, sometimes the underdogs win because of circumstances or luck. The miracle of the oil was merely a sign from Hashem that He had been with the Jews.

(Ner Mitzvah)

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*"It happened after the passage of two years . . . " (41:1)*

Our parashah opens two years after the end of last week's parashah. There, Yosef had interpreted the dreams of Pharaoh's butler and baker. He told the butler, who was about to be reinstated in his position, "If only you would think of me with yourself when he benefits you, and you will do me a kindness if you please, and mention me to Pharaoh, then you would get me out of this building. For indeed I was kidnaped from the land of the Hebrews, and even here I have done nothing for them to have put me in the pit." (40:14-15)

The midrash comments on this: "Praiseworthy is the man who has made Hashem his trust" (Tehilim 40:5) - this is Yosef - 'and turned not to the arrogant' (bid) - because Yosef said to Pharaoh's butler, 'If only you would think of me,' and, 'mention me,' he remained in prison an extra two years."

Many commentaries ask: This midrash appears to contradict itself! First it states that the one "who has made Hashem his trust" is Yosef. Then it appears to say that Yosef was punished for placing his trust in the butler! Most commentaries explain that the first half of the midrash gives the background for the second half. For most people, it would not be a sin to ask the butler for help. "G-d helps those who help themselves." However, because Yosef usually placed his trust in Hashem to an

extraordinary degree, it was a failing on his part to ask the butler for help. (This answer is given by Bet Halevi and others.)

R' Azaryah Figo z"l (1579-1647) gives a very different answer. He explains that Yosef never placed his trust in the butler, and Hashem left Yosef in jail for an extra two years in order to demonstrate this. He interprets Yosef's words to the butler as follows:

*"Even if you would think of me with yourself when [Pharaoh] benefits you, and [even if] you will do me a kindness and mention me to Pharaoh, the most you could do is to get me out of this building. [That would solve my immediate physical problem, but not my spiritual problem.] For indeed I was kidnaped from the land of the Hebrews [and thus expelled from before G-d]. Here I have done nothing for [my spiritual betterment, and therefore G-d has caused that they] have put me in the pit."*

Without this interpretation, says R' Figo, one might wonder how the butler could be so ungrateful as to forget Yosef. With this interpretation, however, it is understandable; in effect, Yosef told the butler that his help was not wanted. The reason Yosef said this was to emphasize that the interpretation of dreams comes from Hashem and that Yosef deserved no credit.

Just to make clear that Yosef never expected help from the butler, Hashem caused the butler to forget Yosef and leave Yosef in jail. The last verse of last week's parashah states, "And the butler did not remember Yosef, and he forgot him." Why the redundant language - "did not remember" and "forgot"? In line with the above interpretation, R' Figo suggests that the phrase, "and he forgot him," means that Yosef forgot the butler. (Binah La'ittim: Drush Rishon Le'Chanukah)

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## An Astonishing Midrash

*At the moment when Yosef said (44:17), "The man in whose possession the goblet was found, only he shall be my slave, and as for the rest of you - go up in peace to your father," a bat kol/voice from heaven said (Tehilim 119:165), "There is abundant peace for the lovers of Your Torah, and there is no stumbling block for them."*

The sin of selling Yosef was a sin between man and his fellow man, for which G-d does not grant atonement until the victim forgives the sinner. When Yosef said, "As for the rest of you - go up in peace to your father," he indicated that he forgave his brothers [although they did not realize it, since they did not know he was Yosef]. This enabled G-d to forgive them, and grant them "abundant peace."

(Binat Nevonim)

### **An alternative explanation:**

Rashi writes: The reason that Yehuda said, "We also will be slaves," is that when a member of a group is caught stealing, the whole group is liable.

Yosef disagreed. Apparently, Yosef held that only the actual thief is liable.

The gemara teaches, "All of the rewards spoken of by the prophets are only for those who support the Torah. As for the Torah scholars themselves, no one has yet seen their reward." Why? Because the reward for Torah study depends upon the student's motivation, whereas supporters of Torah are rewarded no matter what their motivation. (Thus, only G-d knows what the reward of each individual scholar is.)

What if a Torah scholar studies with improper motivation and incurs a punishment from G-d - is his financial backer punished as well? Not according to Yosef, who said, "The man in whose possession the goblet was found, only he shall be my slave, and as for the rest of you - go up in peace to your father." As explained, he held that a group is not liable for the actions of one member. This is the meaning of the verse, "There is abundant peace for the lovers of Torah - i.e., the supporters of Torah - and there is no stumbling block for them." There will always be peace for the supporters of Torah, and any improper motivation of the scholars they support will not be a stumbling block for them.

(R' Shalom Weiss: Ketonet Tashbetz)

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R' Yitzchak ibn Giat z"l born approx. 1020 - died 1091

R' Yitzchak was born in Lucena and died in Cordova (both in Spain). He was close to R' Shmuel Hanaggid, under whom he is thought to have studied, and with R' Shmuel's son, R' Yehosef. R' Yitzchak was appointed as rabbi of Lucena, and under his leadership the community thrived as a center of learning and culture. Numerous students flocked to study under him. He also began to write many works, but never had time to complete them because his role as the principal educator of his generation was so demanding. Of his unfinished manuscripts, the only one that survives is Meah Shearim, a halachic compendium which was cited frequently in the centuries following the author's death. Unlike his contemporary, R' Yitzchak Alfasi ("Rif"), who arranged his halachic work according to the order of the Talmud, R' Yitzchak ibn Giat arranged his work by topics.

The style of Meah Shearim also differs from Rif's work. Whereas Rif's work for the most part mimics the words of the Talmud, but leaves out the discussion leading up to the halachic conclusion, R' Yitzchak first formulates the halachah in his own words, and then offers a review of the sources, engaging the reader in a discussion of the pros and cons of the respective positions. As a result, Meah Shearim is a treasury of literature from the Geonic era (6th - 10th centuries).

R' Yitzchak also wrote a commentary on Kohelet in Arabic. This work has been lost, but is quoted in later commentaries. (Source: The Artscroll Rishonim p.68; Korei Hadorot; Shem Hagedolim)

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