

GRATITUDE TO MAN, BELIEF IN G-D

by Rabbi Moshe Peretz Gilden

"A new king arose over Egypt who did not know of Yosef." (Shemos/Exodus 1:8)

The Talmud (Sotah 11a) explains that the "new king" does not have to be understood literally; rather, it was the same sitting monarch with new decrees. Accordingly, the phrase "did not know of Yosef" means Pharaoh blocked from his consciousness any image of Yosef to allow him to persecute the Jewish nation. But when Pharaoh was confronted by the statement of G-d's desire for the release of the Children of Israel, he responded, "Who is G-d that I should heed his voice?" (Shemos 5:2) Pharaoh was keenly aware of the Infinite G-d; when Yosef interpreted his dreams, Pharaoh instructed Yosef to execute every nuance of plan for the salvation of Egypt, "since G-d has informed you of all this." (Beraishis/Genesis 41:39) It took great audacity to ignore Yosef's acumen and skill that saved his nation, the most powerful on the face of the earth; but how did Pharaoh, who most clearly knew of G-d, later absolutely deny His existence?

Rabbi Meir Rubman (Sefer Zichron Meir) finds the answer in the words of our Sages. Contemplating the extremely severe punishment for one who is ungrateful to his fellow man, the Mishnas Rabbi Eliezer relates it to denying G-d's existence. One who denies G-d's existence is ungrateful to Him by virtue of the denial of the myriad kindnesses that are part and parcel of our daily reality. One who musters the ability to demonstrate ingratitude to his peer will eventually find this attitude manifest toward his Creator.

Thus, it derives that a fundamental underpinning of belief in G-d is the recognition of the good that He does for every individual and mankind as a whole. To accomplish this, one must start working on this virtue in the realm of the tangible - appreciating the generosity of his peers - and then he can apply his developing trait to the more difficult task - appreciating the constant subtle gifts G-d bestows upon us. As the appreciation for G-d develops, the belief in Him is strengthened.

Pharaoh lacked in his appreciation of Yosef. Yosef was the one responsible for the country's great economic strength, not just despite the famine, but due to the famine. Yet Pharaoh chose not to remember Yosef's great kindnesses, to him personally and the Egyptian people nationally. "He did not know Yosef" - he forced himself not to "know" him. This void in his gratitude eventually lead him to completely "forget" about G-d as well.

Fortification of faith in G-d seems like such a daunting task. But where do we start? By showing proper appreciation to our fellow man. One must sense and express gratitude to one's spouse, one's

parents, one's children, one's peers. Developing this virtue will foster an appreciation of G-d, a belief in G-d, and, eventually, a love relationship with G-d.

Have a Good Shabbos!

Copyright © 2004 by [Rabbi Moshe Peretz Gilden](#) and **Torah.org**