

MY SON, THE PRIME MINISTER!

by Rabbi Yaakov Menken

"Hurry, and go up to my father, and say to him, 'So says your son, Yosef: "G-d has placed me as master over all Egypt; come down to me, do not delay.'"" [45:9]

While some comments might be expected from us, they would be extremely surprising coming from our forefathers, the holy founders of the Jewish People. And at first glance, this message from Yosef appears to be one of them.

"Dad! Guess what -- I'm the Prime Minister!" Most fathers would be proud to receive a call like that. "My son, the Prime Minister! That's very good. Even if he didn't make it through med school, he worked out ok. Of course, if he'd become a radiologist like I told him..."

While we might chuckle at this father, the sort who considers the path he laid out for his son more worthwhile than anything else the boy might possibly accomplish, we do know of one profession which Judaism has always regarded more highly than even Prime Minister or President -- and that is to be a scholar of Torah. The ultimate "nachas" (joy, satisfaction) is to have one's sons grow up to be Sages. Yaakov, our forefather, certainly expected this of his dearest and brightest son, Yosef.

Yosef was kidnapped, taken from his position learning Torah by his father's side. Now he sends a message up to his father in a great hurry, excited to reveal that he is Prime Minister of Egypt. Clearly he believes that Yaakov will be excited, but... why? Why would Yaakov be so happy to know that Yosef is now "master over all Egypt," rather than the Torah scholar Yaakov had imagined Yosef would become?

In the Darchei Mussar, Rav Yaakov Naiman answers this question. He says that the important thing was not the news that Yosef was now the Prime Minister, but how Yosef explained it.

When a person is appointed to a position, he or she will normally explain who appointed him or her. "I was deputized by the Chief of Police." "I was elected [by the people] to the Senate." The more important the appointment, the more likely a person will identify the important people who did the appointing.

Yosef, on the other hand, says nothing about Paro (Pharoah). He mentions nothing about how he explained Paro's dreams so well. Yosef says simply: "G-d made me master." "HaShem gave me this job."

Only a person who acknowledges that everything comes from HaShem could give G-d the credit

for such a tremendous accomplishment, without even mentioning what happened and who made the appointment. Of course, HaShem indeed makes everything happen, but only those on a very high spiritual level can see that reality while ignoring the smoke and mirrors of our world. Yosef operated on such a high spiritual level that when he was appointed to a high position, it was not because Paro appointed him -- G-d made it happen.

Now we understand why this was such wonderful news for Yaakov. After so many years outside Yaakov's home, after so many different trials and tribulations, Yosef had nonetheless remained the same Tzaddik (righteous man), the same dedicated scholar of Torah, that he would have become had he remained with his father all those years. None of his experiences had a deleterious impact, and he still attributed everything that happened to HaShem. This was the best possible news Yaakov could have received regarding his son.

Yosef could have attributed his accomplishments to his own abilities -- but he did not do so. He maintained the same pattern set when he went before Paro to explain the dreams, and said "without me, G-d will answer Paro's well-being." [41:16] Even now, when he had accomplished so much and survived so much, he acknowledged that HaShem's hand had made everything happen as it did.

It is natural, and almost to be expected, that when a person achieves something after tremendous effort, he or she will claim credit. When a person goes through difficult trials, it is similarly easy, even likely, that he or she will have complaints, even feelings of anger. These are the times when, if a person has true faith and trust in G-d, it will come shining through. If a person says _then_ that all is from HaShem, that is a person who means it sincerely.

What is it, then, that is in our hands? "All is in the hands of Heaven, save Fear of Heaven." We are the ones who choose to become such people -- and thanks to Yosef, we know it can be done.