

REMEMBERING YOSEPH

by Rabbi Aron Tendler

"A new king arose who did not "Yu'dah - know" Yoseph." The word "Yu'dah" is used by the Torah to describe Pharaoh's apparent "senior moment."

The word "Yu'dah - know" has specific meaning when used by the Torah to describe relationships. It denotes knowledge beyond simple information. It describes knowledge gleaned from the intimate and loving dimension of a relationship, usually between a husband and wife.

The expression, "love is blind" has great merit. The most rose-colored of all glasses are the feelings of love and connection that one person has for another, and nothing is more subjective and less objective. Yet, the Torah suggests that "knowledge" is the byproduct of subjective love rather than objective dispassion! Knowledge should result when the rose-colored glasses of emotions, mutual investments, and shared experiences are replaced with a judicial microscope that magnifies all imperfections and faults. That would result in real knowledge!

The Torah's use of the word "Yu'dah - know" to describe intimacy is not intended to denote objective information and knowledge. It is intended to describe the reality of a loving relationship that on the one hand provides a dimension of knowledge beyond factual information and on the other hand is completely blind and subjective.

First of all, the stage at which a relationship attains "Yu'dah - knowing" is way beyond the initial courtship and infatuation. Those early feelings were intended to blind us to what our eyes might see and our minds might otherwise ask. No one is perfect and we hope that obligation and commitment will replace the early flush of excitement and discovery. Many marriages would never happen if both sides knew everything about each other before the wedding. Thank G-d for infatuation!

Secondly, The stage at which a couple attains "Yu'dah - knowing" is when reality dawns and the faults and imperfections appear from beneath the veneer of first impressions and makeup. At that point the work of true knowledge and intimacy begins. Yet, at the same time that we begin to look at each other under the judicial microscope the work of negotiation, balance, and change creates a commitment that is far more blinding than the earlier stage of infatuation. That is the stage of love that is closest to G-d's love for His children. He too knows all the faults and imperfections. He too is aware of our inconsistencies and betrayals. Yet, He filters the cold glare of judgment by gazing at us through the rose-colored lenses of His love for us.

The stage of "Yu'dah - knowing" is built upon far more real information than attraction, desire, and

initial presentation. It is the result of shared dreams and purpose. It is the love child of self-sacrifice and selflessness. It is the outcome of the poorly timed, foolishly motivated, but uniquely revealing explosions and confrontations that happen in every relationship. It is the stage of love that demands acceptance of imperfection and faults. It is the stage of intimacy at which our selective memories remember the overwhelming good and refuse to focus on the moments of bad.

The problem is that relationships change. Relationships are dynamic rather than static and the stage of "Yu'dah - knowing" is always being challenged. Sometimes it is challenged by actual facts, empirically proven and difficult to ignore. Other times it is laziness and indifference that insidiously saps the energy and determination to make it work at all costs. On occasion it is the evil selfishness of one or the other to gain position, power, and wealth, or to avoid real or imagined hurt.

When any of the above happens our selective memories remove the rose colored filters from the judicial microscope and our inconsistencies, betrayals, faults, and imperfections are starkly exposed. All of a sudden "Yu'dah - knowing" is the basis of resentment and hatred. All of a sudden love turns to hatred and intimacy into hurt. The story of our enslavement in Egypt by Pharaoh is the story of such a tragedy.

As noted by the Torah at the end of Vayigash, Yoseph was responsible for saving the Egyptians from starvation, advancing Egypt to the position of the world's wealthiest and progressive civilization, and reorganizing the entire Egyptian social structure. It would have been impossible for any ruler to "forget Yoseph." Pharaoh's "not knowing" had to be deliberate. The love and appreciation that Egypt felt toward Yoseph and his people, and should have continued to feel for the Jewish population, had to be challenged by Pharaoh if it was to change.

Rav Shimshon Raphael Hirsch made the following comment. "This very first instance of Jew-hatred did not arise spontaneously from amidst the people but had been fomented by the ruling circles. It was they who had to goad the people into envying the Jews. Jew-hatred was a political tool which the new ruler used in order to consolidate his own power."

"A new king arose who did not know Yoseph." The Torah describes Pharaoh's negative processing in the most succinct yet revealing of terms. The relationship that had existed between Egypt, Yoseph, and the Jews was one of "Yu'dah - knowing." It was a relationship that allowed for the acceptance and respect of differences. It was a relationship that suggested mutual gain and appreciation. It was a relationship that could ignore the inevitable irritations because they were all smart enough to respect each other's space and boundaries.

Enter Pharaoh the "New King." With malice and intent he challenged the norms of intimacy, acceptance, and "Yu'dah - knowing". "They are different than us! They have begun to expand beyond their borders! At one time they were humble and dependent, now they are growing independent and strong. Let's not be foolish! The next thing you know they will conspire with our enemies to remove us from power and expel us from the land!"

Love is blind and so is hatred. The past is only as real as the present remembers it. With our unique capacity to choose, we can focus on the good and ignore the bad or we can focus on the bad and ignore the good. The new Pharaoh chose to fabricate the bad and deny the good. He chose to only see as far as his feelings, perceptions, desires, and ambitions.

The truth is that our challenge is no different. As individuals, families, and a nation we must choose the manner and degree of our love for each other and the rest of the world. We can choose to create a world of intimacy and love, or a world of indifference and hatred. Will we remember Yoseph or deliberately forget him? It's our choice.

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