

HELP WANTED

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Rabbi Frand on Parshas Miketz

*These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 309, "Lo Sechanaim" Giving Gifts to Non-Jews.
Good Shabbos!*

Help Wanted: Ish Navon V'Chachom -- Bureaucrats Need Not Apply

Our Parsha begins with the story of Pharoah's dream. Yosef interpreted that the seven thin cows swallowing up the seven fat cows symbolized seven good years that would be followed by seven lean years. To prepare for this impending famine, Yosef suggested the establishment of a governmental agency to collect food during the years of plenty and distribute food during the years of famine. The specific language of the suggestion was "Now let Pharoah seek out a 'discerning and wise man' and set him over the land of Egypt" [Bereishis 41:33].

The author of Shay Le'Torah asks the following question. Why did Yosef stress the attributes of wisdom and understanding in describing the individual who should be in charge of the new agency? The task required a bureaucrat par excellence. It would seem that the most important qualifying attribute for the director of the new agency should have been excellent organizational skills, rather than wisdom or intelligence.

The answer is that Yosef felt that this situation required someone who was a Chochom [wise person]. "What is the definition of a Chochom? One who foresees what will be." [Tamid 32a] When a country is enjoying seven years of plenty, rare is the person who can imagine that the bubble is going to burst - that products, which are now in abundance, will become scarce commodities.

People who lived through the "boom years" of the 1980s when it was so easy to make money in real

estate, have difficulty imagining a market where one can not sell anything, or even rent anything. In the "good old days" when gas was 35 cents or 40 cents a gallon, surplus oil was burned off at the oil wells. They had too much. They did not know what to do with it all. "Unproductive wells" which were not producing 100 barrels a day, were abandoned. Later, when we all stood in the gas lines, we looked back and thought, "We remember the fish that we ate..." [Bamidbar 11:5]. We remembered the good old days when we could just pull up and the attendant would wash our windows and check our oil.

The same thing was true in Egypt. When grain was so plentiful, it was very difficult to convince people that it was necessary to save, to put away for tomorrow. Who would be able to inspire the people that the "good times" would not last forever? It could not be done a bureaucrat. Only a "wise and discerning individual" might prove equal to the task. The task required a "Chochom" who could see the future and help others perceive the future and convince them of the reality of that future. That is why only someone of the caliber of Yosef met the qualifications for the job.

No Tzitzis In The World To Come

There is an interesting incident told about the Gaon of Vilna. When on his deathbed, he began to cry. His students asked him why he was crying. The Gaon picked up his Tzitzis, held them in his hand and told his students as follows: "We are living in the 'seven fat years'. The 'seven fat years' are this world. For the price of a pair of Tzitzis - consisting of a thin little garment with some strings - a person can acquire 'worlds'. One hour of repentance and good deeds in this world is superior to all of life in the next world [Vayikra Rabbah Chapter 3]. However, the World To Come is the 'seven years of famine'. In that world there are no more Mitzvos. There is no tzitzis; there are no Tephillin, there is no learning Torah. True, there is reward in the World To Come, but there is no opportunity to do Mitzvos."

A person has to be a "Chochom" to realize that we are in the 'Go-Go' days now. Now it is easy to 'grab' a recitation of Krias Shma, a proper Shmoneh Esrai, an act of kindness, or a good deed. However, human tendency is to waste money when it comes so easily, to waste oil when it is so plentiful. Only when the resource becomes scarce do we look back remorsefully, while stuck in the gas line, and say "How stupid we were! We did not save! We did not put away!"

This is how people may feel, Heaven Forbid, in the World To Come. "How stupid we were. We had the opportunities. They were just lying around waiting for us." That is why the Gaon picked up his Tzitzis while on his deathbed and started to cry - because there are no more Tzitzis in the World To Come.

When we read Parshas Miketz on Shabbos, let us think about the seven fat years and the seven lean years. It is a nice story about the cows and the Egyptian agricultural cycle of millennia ago. But it has a contemporary message for all of us. It is time to act, time to grab. We are in the midst of the seven fat years. One day they will end. We will look back and say, "we wasted them". We will feel silly and stupid, because the opportunities were lying in the streets and sitting on the shelves, and we failed

to take advantage of them.

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This write-up was adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tape series on the weekly Torah portion. The complete list of halachic topics covered in this series for Parshas Miketz are provided below:

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