

TIME STUDY

by Rabbi Raymond Beyda

In most years the Shabbat of Hanukkah and the public reading of Parashat Miketz coincide. The Parasha begins with G-d's intervention to release Yosef from prison after 12 years in the dungeon. Pharaoh has a disturbing night, losing sleep over dreams about cows and wheat that his interpreters fail to explain satisfactorily. His wine steward, recently freed from prison, relates to the monarch the events leading up to his release from prison, whereby a Jewish slave interpreted his dream as well as that of the Royal Baker correctly. The Pharaoh summons Yosef and Yosef successfully deciphers the dreams. There will be 7 years of plenty followed by 7 years of famine. Then Yosef, unsolicited, gives the King advice. "Now let Pharaoh seek a discerning and wise man and appoint him over the land of Egypt"(44:33)

The commentators ask, "Why did Yosef offer advice?" If Pharaoh wanted advice he would have asked for it. Furthermore, in an absolute monarchy, the King might simply take offense and rule that Yosef should be put to death for insubordination. Why did he take such a chance?

The Ramban answers that the advice was part of the interpretation of the dream and not additional information. It was an action plan and was an integral part of the dream's meaning.

Rav Abraham Pam Zt'l suggests an additional explanation. Yosef realized that in times of plenty people tend to waste. Conservation of resources when one is being showered with a seemingly endless, generous supply is far from the minds of the beneficiaries of G-d's kindness. Yosef realized that the Egyptians would not conserve and that when the hard times hit they would suffer hunger and loss of life. To forestall disaster he took the chance of speaking out of turn to Pharaoh. The Pharaoh seeing the wisdom of the 30-year-old man, not only accepted his plan but also put him in charge of the project. Yosef led the people of Egypt for eighty consecutive years of prosperity, including the 2 years of famine that did eventually come. [The 7 years of famine were never completed because the famine ended miraculously when Yaakov Abinu a"h arrived in Egypt].

There is a practical lesson to be learned from Yosef's insight. Don't waste time during your youth -- the days of plenty, because life is short and eventually everyone will face the inevitable -- the days of famine, where spiritual accomplishments can no longer be achieved. Young people do not feel a sense of urgency to learn and to grow and to do misvot. One tends to be lulled into a lazy sense of complacency, feeling that there is time to pursue spiritual accomplishments later in life. That youth is for fun and relaxation is a common misconception. People don't value a minute an hour or even a day when they feel they have so many more coming. The Talmud says, "If a person doesn't prepare

on ereb Shabbat [Friday] what will he eat on Shabbat? [Saturday, when it is forbidden to prepare cooked meals]. Rather than suffer regret one should value one's time. Can I read another chapter of Tehillim? Can I do another kindness for another human being? Can I answer another Amen or do another of G-d's commandments? These are the questions that should help a person do a profit-yielding time study. The Hafetz Haim Zt'l said that a person can speak 200 words in one minute and every word of Torah or consolation and assistance to another constitutes a Misvah --12,000 per hour! Start calculating the value of your day and you will become more frugal with the use of your time.

Rav Pam also suggests the connection between Hanukkah and this Parasha. The land of Israel is known to be blessed with a lot of olive oil. In times of plenty no one would have paid any attention to one small flask of pure oil. Yet in their hour of need the discovery of even a small amount of this otherwise readily available commodity resulted in a miracle and a holiday for the generations. We celebrate with Hallel and ho-da-ah, wild praise and thanks to G-d for providing a necessity in an hour of need. The lesson of Yosef and the crux of our celebration share a common principle. Value what you have while you still have it. One day it will disappear! Don't waste life it is too valuable to waste.

DID YOU KNOW THAT

On Friday evening of Hanukkah one should light the Hanukkah lights BEFORE one lights the Shabbat candles. Even though the man lights the Hanukkah lights and the woman lights the Shabbat candles, the woman should wait for her husband to complete his lighting before she lights. If, however, it is the seventh or eighth night and she fears that by waiting for her husband to finish lighting the time for her to light might pass she may light after her husband lights the first candle. (Source Ben Ish Hai, Miketz Hilkhos Hanukkah 20).

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