

תורה מציון Torah MiTzion

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I Understood A Language That I Had Not Known By Rav Dror Brama

This week's Torah portion tells us about Joseph's interpretations of Pharaoh's dreams as well as his subsequent economic advice. Joseph foresees seven years of plenty in Egypt followed by seven years of heavy famine. He advises Pharaoh to prepare for the years of famine by stockpiling food and seeds during the years of plenty.

Pharaoh's reaction to these suggestions is surprising and seems extreme:

Pharaoh said to his courtiers, "Could we find another like him, a man in whom the spirit of God rests?" So Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Since God has made all this known to you, there is none as discerning and wise as you. You shall be in charge of my court, and by your command shall all my people be directed; only with respect to the throne shall I be superior to you." Pharaoh further said to Joseph, "See, I put you in charge of all the land of Egypt" (*Bereishit* 41:38-41).

Granted, Joseph's interpretation of the dreams is impressive and wonderful. His advice in light of them demonstrates great wisdom. But are these sufficient to appoint Joseph as ruler over the entire Egyptian Empire? Is this not a hasty response on Pharaoh's part? He clothes Joseph, gives him a chariot, and continues to shower authority upon Joseph by declaring:

I am Pharaoh; yet without you, no one shall lift up hand or foot in all the land of Egypt. (*Ibid.* verse 44).

Joseph is given absolute control, not only in the economic realm, but over all of Egyptian life. The Torah does not tell us what stands behind Joseph's rapid rise, but there is a verse in *Psalms* which seems to be related. Thursday's psalm, Chapter 81, speaks of the obligation of the Jewish people to praise and call out to God:

Take up the song, sound the timbrel, the melodious lyre and harp.
Blow the shofar on the new moon, at the time appointed for our festive day.
For it is a law for Israel, a rule of the God of Jacob;
He appointed it in Joseph for a testimony, when he went forth over the land of Egypt; I understood a language that I had not known.
I relieved his shoulder of the burden, his hands were freed from the basket.

These are very difficult verses, particularly the verse which relates to Joseph. The poet tells us that it is obligatory to praise and call out to God on the New Moon (Rosh Chodesh) and New Year (Rosh HaShanah). This joyousness is seen as a testimony to Joseph when he went forth to rule in Egypt. However, "Joseph" is written here in an unusual fashion (with an extra *heh*, which incorporates God's Name into his name). Additionally, it is unclear what Joseph has to do with the second part of the verse, "I understood a language that I had not known." Who spoke about acquiring a new language? Where is there praise and calling out to God when Joseph goes to rule Egypt?

Our Sages solve these problems with a wonderful story:

R. Chiya bar Abba said in the name of R. Yochanan: At the moment when Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Without you, no one shall lift up hand, etc.," Pharaoh's astrologers exclaimed, "Will you set in power over us a slave whom his master bought for twenty pieces of silver?!" Pharaoh replied, "I discern royal characteristics in him." They retorted, "In that case, he must know seventy languages." Gabriel came and tried to teach Joseph the seventy languages, but he could not learn them. Thereupon Gabriel added a letter from God's Name to Joseph's name, and he succeeded in learning the languages, as it is said, "He appointed it in Joseph for a testimony, when he went forth over the land of Egypt; I understood a language that I had not known." The next day, in whatever language Pharaoh conversed with him, Joseph was able to respond. But when Joseph spoke to him in the holy tongue (Hebrew), Pharaoh did not understand what he said. He asked Joseph to teach it to him; he tried, but Pharaoh could not learn it. Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Swear to me that you will not reveal [that I cannot learn Hebrew];" and he swore to him (*Sotah* 36b).

Our Sages begin with our question, which they place in the mouths of Pharaoh's astrologers: How can a slave, who was bought for twenty pieces of silver, rule over Egypt? Pharaoh responds that he senses that this is not your standard servant, and that he sees royalty within Joseph. The wise men object: Perhaps he is fit to be a provincial ruler, but is he fit to lead a world empire? Does he speak seventy languages? Pharaoh accepts this challenge, and decides to quiz Joseph the next day in the seventy languages. That night, Gabriel tries to teach Joseph the seventy languages, but Joseph doesn't get it. He is a Hebrew who was kidnapped from the home of Jacob, and in fact is not connected to the cultural world of the seventy nations of the world. Now the surprise -- a letter of God's Name is added to Joseph's, and he masters seventy languages.

What is the meaning of this story? How does adding a letter enable Joseph to learn seventy languages?

According to our Sages, the key is to be found in the call of the shofar, in its praising and calling out (*teruah*) to the Sovereign of the world. The Jewish nation dwells alone. Left in its natural state, it does not speak seventy languages. However, the earliest law and rule of this nation, the foundation which allows one of its members to survive the misery of the Egyptian jail, is praise and calling out to God.

In the previous chapter (40:8), when speaking of the dreams of the inmates, Joseph says to them, "Surely God can interpret! Tell me [your dreams]." Joseph follows in the footsteps of his ancestors and constantly attributes everything to God. The patriarchs were engaged in spreading the name of God throughout the world and directing everything to Him. Drawing strength from this attribution, from the ability to connect all of existence to the will of God, Joseph is able to speak every language. We say this in prayer: "For every knee will bow to You, every tongue (language) will swear in Your Name."

Joseph interprets the dreams for Pharaoh, but with the same breath he says to him, "God has revealed to Pharaoh what He is about to do" (41:28). The principle which motivates Joseph is the sovereignty of God in the world. This is also the principle informing our prayers on Rosh HaShanah, which is "the time appointed for our festive day."

When Pharaoh understands this, he requests that Joseph teach him the holy tongue. Joseph tries, but it becomes clear that this is impossible. As long as Pharaoh thinks "I am Pharaoh," he is unable to absorb the concept of God's sovereignty in the world.

God created the world and rules over it. One who tries to tie all areas of life to the King of the world is able to become acquainted with and understand the spiritual roots of all languages and cultures. This role is destined for the Jewish nation, and so the poet promises at the end of the same chapter of Psalms:

If only My people would listen to Me, if Israel would follow My paths,
then would I subdue their enemies at once, strike their foes again and again . . .
I would sate you with honey from the rock (*Psalms* 81:14-17).

If we learn one language well, if we can truly listen to the holy tongue and the sound of the shofar, then God will take the rocks -- the toughest and hardest parts of life -- and turn them into honey.

**"Happy is the Man Who Places His Trust in God - This is Yosef"
Rav Yossi Slotnik, former Rosh Kollel, Cape Town**

At the end of parshat Vayeshev, we hear Yosef's request of the royal butler:
"But remember me with you when it will be well with you, and please do kindness with me and mention me to Paro, and bring me out of this house. For I was stolen away from the land of the Hebrews; also here I have done nothing to cause them to put me in the dungeon."

But, as we know, the parsha ends with a disappointing anticlimax:
"The butler did not remember Yosef, but forgot him".

Rashi, quoting the Midrash, offers the following comment:
"Because Yosef trusted [the butler] to remember him, he was required to remain imprisoned for a further two years."

This is a most puzzling assertion: could anyone imagine that the correct course of action for Yosef would be to sit and do nothing to help himself? After all, our tradition teaches that a person must make his own efforts, and God will help him to be saved. Is it possible that God punishes Yosef for making every possible effort to get himself out of prison?

A look at the midrash in question (Bereishit Rabba [Vilna] parsha 89) only exacerbates our bewilderment:

"Happy is the man who places his trust in God' - this is Yosef, 'and does not turn to arrogant people' - Since he told the royal butler, "remember me" and "make mention of me", a further two years were added for him."

The Midrash would seem to be contradicting itself: Yosef is the classic example of someone who appeals to "arrogant people" - for he asks the butler for help, and the Midrash itself regards the two more years that he spent in prison as the result of this appeal. How, then, can Yosef be regarded as the prototype of a person who "places his trust in God"?

Some years ago I heard from Rav Breuer that had the butler not "forgotten" Yosef, Yosef would have thought that what saved him from prison was his own assertiveness. He asked the royal butler for help, and he indeed helped him - this understanding would remove God from the picture. But after two more years passed and it was clear to all - especially Yosef - that the butler had forgotten him, and then suddenly he remembered him, it was clear that that this was the hand of Divine Providence, not coincidence. Rav Breuer in fact maintained that the two extra years were not a "punishment", but rather a necessity arising from the Divine plan. Since God wanted Yosef to understand that Divine Providence was involved, Yosef needed to remain imprisoned for another two years, in order that this message would not be ambiguous or unclear.

I believe that this inspired explanation can help us to understand the Midrash. We need to consider what Yosef thought when his plan to receive assistance from the butler failed. Was he overcome with despair? Did he give up? Did he begin to accustom himself to his fate in prison?

The Midrash answers unequivocally, "Happy is the man who places his faith in God - this is Yosef"! Yosef never placed his faith in arrogant people. Neither when he appealed to the butler for help nor when this plan "cost" him another two years in prison did he turn to arrogant people; he never relied on them to save him. His trust was always with God. Even if the butler would have remembered him immediately upon being freed, and even when he does actually remember him, two years later, Yosef is fully aware that it is the hand of God that pulls the strings.

The Midrash is actually questioning the equation that King David draws in this psalm: not everyone who turns to arrogant people ceases to place his trust in God. The question is whether he places his trust in those people, or whether he merely appeals to them. And the example chosen is Yosef, who - despite having appealed to the butler - is nevertheless considered the model of one who places his trust in God.

The other wonderful example of this duality is what we celebrate at this very time - the festival of Hannukah. The distance from the victories of the Maccabees over the Greeks to an assertion that "my might and the strength of my hand have achieved all of this valor" is a short one. The Maccabees possessed the insight to direct their victory towards the purification of the Temple - thereby making a statement that it was God who had brought about the victory of "the few against the many" and the delivery of "the wicked ones into the hands of those involved in Torah". There is no attempt here to blur the fact that heroic

battles were waged by mortals, but it is accompanied by the understanding that human victory is rooted in man having placed his trust in God.

Bishul Akum, part 6 **Rav Nehemya Taylor, Torani Advisor to Torah MiTzion**

In the previous column on *bishul akum* (eating food cooked by non-Jews), we wrote about the definition of "fit for a king's table." Now we will elaborate upon a number of practical applications.

Commenting on the Talmud's discussion of beer (*Avodah Zarah* 31b), *Tosafot* suggest a novel idea: "There is another reason to exclude beer from the prohibition of *bishul akum*. When it comes to the blessing, we consider the grain in beer negligible compared to the water (so we make *shehakol* on the water, not *mezonot* on the grain). So too, when it comes to *bishul akum*, we consider the grain in beer negligible compared to the water (which is not subject to *bishul akum*)."

The *Pri Chadash* (*Yoreh De'ah* 114) adds: "One may drink coffee in the home of a non-Jew. Even though the coffee bean is not eaten raw, nevertheless *bishul akum* does not apply, because coffee is not fit for a king's table, nor is it eaten with bread. Even without these reasons, we could still permit coffee. When it comes to the blessing, the coffee bean is negligible compared to the water (we make *shehakol* on the water, not *ha'etz* on the bean). So too, when it comes to *bishul akum*, we consider the coffee bean negligible compared to the water. This is similar to what *Tosafot* says about beer" (cited above).

According to the *Pri Chadash* there are two reasons to permit drinking coffee:

- A) It is not fit for a king's table.
- B) The coffee beans are negligible compared to the water.

However, the *Pit'chei Teshuvah* (*Yoreh De'ah* 114) points out that his grandfather, the *Panim Me'ivot* (2:62), disagrees with applying the first reason to coffee: "Even regarding beer, the primary reason that *Tosafot* permit it is not because the grain is negligible compared to the water, but rather because beer is not fit for a king's table. Alternatively, the *Bach* suggests that the fear of intermarriage is irrelevant, because nobody drinks beer socially so it never creates any fellowship. However, when it comes to coffee, we see that it fit for a king's table and that people do drink it socially. So it is fitting for a *ba'al nefesh* (spiritual person) not to drink coffee or tea which was prepared by a non-Jew."

The Radbaz in his responsa (3:637), as quoted by the Maharsham (2:263), relates to this issue and relies upon the first reason of the *Pri Chadash*. "I have investigated this [coffee] bean, and it is not eaten raw, but rather is roasted in special utensils which soften it a bit. It is fit for a king's table and they do eat and drink it there, but it is not eaten with bread and is therefore not prohibited on account of *bishul akum*. We might think that it would nevertheless be forbidden because the utensils may have been used for non-kosher food. However, this is not an issue since the non-Jews use special utensils for this purpose only, so that no other taste will ruin the drink. Normally, we do not rely on the assumption that 'Utensils have not been used in the past twenty-four hours,' unless a question of *kashrut* has already arisen. However, in this case we may rely on it, since the non-Jews themselves are careful to use the utensils only for this drink."

The Maharsham accepts the words of the Radbaz in practice (*Responsa of Maharsham*, 2:262). This means that one need not worry about either *bishul akum* or *kashrut* of utensils

in places which sell only coffee and which are careful about the type of coffee, and in which the appliances used to prepare the coffee are devoted exclusively to that purpose. When it comes to drinking the coffee with milk, the additional problem of *chalav akum* (milk that was milked by non-Jews) arises, and we will leave that for a future time.

Rav Ovadia Yosef ruled this way as well (*Yechaveh Da'at* 4:42). "To summarize: it is permitted to drink coffee made by non-Jews, and one need not worry about *bishul akum*. The later authorities wrote that this is the widespread practice everywhere. If a law is unclear to you, go out and see what the communal practice is, and follow it (*Yerushalmi, Pe'ah* 7:5). One who wishes to be personally stringent is worthy of blessing." (See also *Shevet HaLevi* 2:44 who is stringent, consistent with his position which we discussed in column 5.)

The Maharsham, in the same responsum, makes an additional point. "Similarly, when it comes to chocolate there is no prohibition, since it is eaten raw. (This disagrees with the *Panim Me'irot*, who is stringent.) However, it is known that chocolate nowadays may be mixed with non-kosher ingredients, so it should not be eaten unless a God-fearing person provided kosher supervision." It is clear from his words that the only problem with eating chocolate is the possibility of non-kosher ingredients, but not *bishul akum*. The reason is that chocolate is prepared by roasting the cocoa beans, grinding them, liquefying them, and mixing them with other ingredients such as oil and margarine. The beans are edible after roasting, even before being cooked. Therefore, when they are later cooked by a non-Jew, they are not prohibited, because it is as if they are edible raw. Roasting by a non-Jew does not cause them to be prohibited, because at that point they are not fit for a king's table. Thus the *Chatam Sofer* writes, in his novellae to *Avodah Zarah* 31b, "It is clear that chocolate is edible raw, and is permitted."

Nowadays, when big companies are careful to publicize the exact contents of each product, and they are liable to severe governmental punishment if they report falsely, the Maharsham's fear is neutralized. Of course, all this is speaking of pareve chocolate which does not contain milk, but when it comes to milk chocolate the question also touches on the issue of *chalav akum*, which we will leave for a future time.

With this we have completed our columns on the parameters of *bishul akum*. In upcoming columns we will deal with the issue of *pat akum* (non-Jewish bread) and its ramifications.

If you have specific questions which arise from the columns up to now, you can reach me by email at taylon@mail.biu.ac.il or through the Torah MiTzion office: office@torahmitzion.org.

**Family Learning: Parshat Miketz
Bluma Zalcman**

- 1) What were Pharaoh's dreams?
- 2) What was the name Pharaoh gave Yoseph, and what does it mean?
- 3) What did Yoseph suggest to Pharaoh to do in order to have an abundant supply of food for the years of famine?
- 4) What did Yoseph accuse his brothers as doing, and who did he keep in Egypt until they would return?
- 5) What was the condition Yoseph gave his brothers if they ever wanted to return to purchase food?

Answers follow below

Love of The Land: Petach Tikva

Petach Tikva, also known as "the mother of the colonies", is a city located in the Gush Dan area of central Israel. It started out as a moshava (colony) in 1878, and was declared a city in the year 1937.

Petach Tikva is considered the first of the Moshavot, although technically Gei Oni was the first moshava to be established. The first settlers who lived in Petach Tikva were: Yehoshua Stamfeffer, Yoel Moshe Solomon, Zerach Brant, and David Guttman. The name "Petach Tikva" was taken from a passuk in sefer Hoshea.

The story of the establishment of Petach Tikva is documented in the song "Yoel Moshe's Ballad" which was written by Yoram Taharlev. The song tells the story of how the four men came to place that would become Petach Tikva, Umlevas, with a doctor from Yaffo. The doctor predicted that the place isn't suitable for people to live because he couldn't hear any birds chirping, which was a bad sign. He hurriedly ran away fearing for his health, and three of the men turned to leave. Yoel Moshe put his foot down and said "I'm not leaving". They then started exploring the area.

The doctor turned out to be right. A short while after its establishment, the residents of Petach Tikva were victims of a Malaria epidemic. After a short while, the moshava emptied out. Four years after the outbreak of the epidemic, in 1884, the original founders started rebuilding houses in the area.

During the years of the Second Aliyah, a lot of Olim came to Petach Tikva to fulfill what they felt was the Zionist dream, which included "conquering the workforce" from the Arab workers.

During World War I the people of Petach Tikva hosted many Jews who were expelled from their homes by the Ottoman Empire. Many Jews refused to be drafted into the Ottoman army, which fought against the invading British and suffered because of their refusal. Petach Tikva also suffered due to its location, which was pretty much in the middle of the two armies.

The years during World War I were difficult. The economy of the city dwindled since they weren't allowed to export to Europe. The harvest was lost due to a plague of locusts and the Ottoman Empire made very harsh decrees against the Jews. However, the residents of Petach Tikva managed to keep the independence of the Moshava.

After the First World War, Petach Tikva became a center for the Zionist movement. Settlement nucleuses were created in Petach Tikva as were guard units that were sent out to the rest of the country. Many of the country's leaders, including Golda Meir, David Ben Gurion, and Levi Eshkol, received their basic farm training in Petach Tikva and then moved to different locations around Israel to start new settlements.

In 1921 Petach Tikva received the status of a local council by the British, who occupied Israel at the time. And almost two decades later, was granted the status of a city.

After the War of Independence, the city grew rapidly, almost doubling its population in six years. Nowadays Petach Tikva is a large, modern city with many facilities for its residents.

Torah MiTzion establishes Religious Zionist Kollels (centers of Jewish learning and outreach) in Diaspora Jewish communities to strengthen the study of Torah, Jewish identity, the unity of the Jewish people, and the connection between Torah study and Israel.

The Kollels, led by a Rosh Kollel, are comprised of Israeli shlichim (emissaries) - married men and their wives, and single young men, graduates of Yeshivot Hesder in Israel - who serve in the communities for a period of one-three years.

Torah MiTzion is also proud to be a partner of the "**Jewish Learning Initiative**" program on college campuses.

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Answers:Family Learning

- 1) - He was by the Nile river and he saw 7 fat cows swallowed up by seven skinny cows.
- He was by the river and saw seven fat ears of corn swallowed up by seven skinny ears
- 2) Tzofnat Ponayach- revealer of secrets
- 3) Store the extra food from the seven years of plenty.
- 4) He accused them of spying and he kept Shimon in Egypt.
- 5) They had to bring their youngest brother.