

DIMENSIONS IN CHUMASH

PARSHAS MIKETZ

Two Additional Years

וַיְהִי מִקֵּץ שְׁנַתִּים יָמִים

It happened at the end of two years¹

Our parsha begins two years after Yosef made his request to the chief butler to remember him to Pharaoh. Indeed, the Midrash² states that these two years were in punishment for Yosef's words at that time, for they represented a breach of *bitachon* (trust in Hashem) on Yosef's part. However, we need to understand why this request was looked upon in such a negative light. Yosef, by that stage, had been in jail for ten years and the butler's release presented an opportunity for him to secure his own release. Is it not acceptable to engage in *hishtadlus* (effort) alongside *bitachon*? Was he expected to do nothing? Additionally, why did this infraction lead to two extra years?

Bitachon is typically referred to as a "trait". However, a more meaningful understanding of *bitachon* is that it is a mood. After all, when one trusts in someone else and relies on them, one's mood is free from the anxiety that would exist if he had to deal with the situation by himself. Indeed, this is the description of *bitachon* as found in the classic work Chovos Halevavos:³

"Trust" is the peace of mind one has as he relies on someone else.

In other words, *bitachon* is not defined by what one does or does not do. Those actions are expressions of *bitachon*; *bitachon* itself is a mood and a state of being.

In this light, let us consider the following fascinating and profound approach as to where Yosef was found wanting, provided by R' Shlomo Kluger. It may well have been acceptable for Yosef to ask the butler to remember him, as that represents basic *hishtadlus*. However, even if the request itself was legitimate, the question remains — when is the right time to ask? Yosef has just established, through his own interpretation of the dream, that the butler will be released from jail in three days' time. This means that until day three he is not going anywhere. Yosef asked him immediately, even though he does not need to

1 Bereishis 41:1.

2 Cited in Rashi to Bereishis 40:23 s.v. *vayishkacheiyu*.

3 *Shaar Habitachon* chap. 4

mention this to the butler for another two days. Why does he ask now? In terms of the exceedingly high standard of *bitachon* expected of Yosef, making this request two days early was a symptom of unease and anxiety. It was as if he couldn't afford to wait another two days. For the level of reliance expected from Yosef, this was a breach of the mood of *bitachon*, for which he spent another two years in jail. Moreover, we now understand why the extension was for two years specifically, one for each day that he preceded his request.

As always, we are not expected to conduct ourselves in accordance with the level expected of the greats of the Chumash. We are, however, fully expected to learn the relevant lessons from them, to be applied at our own level. Indeed, every application of the mood of *bitachon* into our own experience will serve to bestow more meaning on those two extra years through which the Torah taught it.

וַיְהִי מִקֵּץ שְׁנַת־יָמִים וּפְרָעָה חָלָם

It happened at the end of two years, and Pharaoh was dreaming⁴

The beginning of our parsha relates how, two years after the chief butler was released from prison, Pharaoh had dreams that no one could interpret, at which point the chief butler recalled Yosef who had interpreted his dreams and recommended that he be brought before Pharaoh. Rav Yosef Nechemiah Kornitzer⁵ raises two basic questions regarding this episode:

1. Verse 8 states that in the morning, Pharaoh was agitated concerning his dreams, whereupon he sent for “all the magicians and wise men in Egypt” to tell them his dreams, yet none could interpret them to Pharaoh’s satisfaction. We can only imagine how many hundreds, if not thousands, of wise men existed throughout the Land of Egypt; yet the verse says that Pharaoh was able to assemble them all – as well as to hear all their interpretations – within one morning! How was this possible?
2. The final verse of last week’s parsha informs us that whereas Yosef asked the chief butler to remember him to Pharaoh, the latter forgot about Yosef for two years, remembering him only two years later. The question is: Barring Pharaoh requiring Yosef’s services – such as now when he has had these obscure dreams – what meaningful opportunity would there have been for him to be mentioned? Surely we do not expect that the chief butler’s relationship with Pharaoh was such that purely apropos of nothing he could just mention that there was someone in jail whom he recommended should be released. In the absence of some opportune time to mention Yosef, in what way do we understand that the chief butler “forgot him”?

Rav Kornitzer therefore explains that these two dreams were not experienced by Pharaoh on just one occasion two years after the chief butler had been released. Rather, Pharaoh had these dreams *every night* during these two years. In other words, when the opening verse states “וּפְרָעָה חָלָם”, it is not to be translated as “Pharaoh was dreaming,” but “Pharaoh was *still* dreaming”! Accordingly, when the later verse says that in the morning he called all the wise men of Egypt, this describes the scene that would take *every morning during those two years*, over the course of which Pharaoh had opportunity to hear from all the wise men in the land, none of whom could successfully interpret the dreams.

We now appreciate the full impact of the idea that the chief butler “did not remember Yosef”, for throughout these entire two years when Pharaoh was in dire need of assistance, the idea of Yosef as a worthy candidate eluded him. Indeed, this gives us new insight into his opening words to Pharaoh, “אַתָּה הֹטְאֵי אֲנִי מִזְכִּיר הַיּוֹם – I recall my sins today.”⁶ To what is he referring? If it is to the episode that led to him being thrown into jail, that is one sin; why does he mention “sins” in the plural? Rather, says Rav Kornitzer, in mentioning Yosef to Pharaoh only now, he was admitting his sins, i.e. every day over the past two years when he had not brought Yosef to Pharaoh’s attention.

That is a Chiddush!

⁴ Bereishis 41:1.

⁵ A great grandson of the Chasam Sofer and the Rav in Krakow in the early part of the twentieth century, *Chiddushei Rav Yosef Nechemiah*, Parshas Miketz.

⁶ Verse 9.