



Parshas Mikeitz

December 18, 2020

A Taste of Torah

Not Worth the Effort

by Rabbi Chaim Yeshaya Freeman

The parsha opens two years after the butler's release from prison, and tells of Pharaoh's two mysterious dreams. Pharaoh arises in the morning, disturbed by these dreams, and makes numerous unsuccessful attempts to find a satisfying interpretation. It is then that the *sar hamashkim*, the butler, speaks up before Pharaoh and tells him about a young Hebrew who had been with him in jail who had accurately interpreted his dream as well as that of the baker. Pharaoh immediately has Yosef brought before him. Yosef interprets Pharaoh's dream, Pharaoh is pleased, and Yosef is made viceroy of Egypt. The rest, as they say, is history.

Rashi (Mikeitz 40:23) cites a Medrash that because Yosef had requested from the butler that he remember him and mention him to Pharaoh, he was penalized with having to spend an additional two years in jail. The Medrash cites a verse (Psalms 40:5), "Fortunate is the one who makes Hashem his security, and does not turn to the arrogant ones," and explains that the "fortunate one" mentioned in the verse refers to Yosef, while the "arrogant ones" refer to the Egyptians, namely, the butler. The Bais Halevi (Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveitchik; 1820-1892) is bothered as to why Yosef was punished for what seem to be reasonable *hishtadlus*, efforts, to get himself freed from jail. Furthermore, how can the verse refer to Yosef, if Yosef failed and was punished for making too much *hishtadlus*?

The Bais Halevi explains that *hishtadlus* is not a one-size-fits-all

reality. Every person must strike a balance between the proper *bitachon* (trust) to place in Hashem and the *hishtadlus* one must make to achieve one's goals. The greater one's level of trust in Hashem is, the less *hishtadlus* he should be making. Yosef, with his exalted level of righteousness and trust in Hashem, made too much *hishtadlus* by even asking the butler to intercede on his behalf. The Medrash therefore understands that Yosef is personified in the verse, as it was precisely his tremendous trust in Hashem that led him to be punished for merely asking the butler to remember him and mention him to Pharaoh.

However, the language of Rashi implies a different issue. Rashi explains that "the arrogant ones" mentioned in the verse refers to the Egyptians. The verse is thus essentially saying that the person who does not rely upon the arrogant Egyptians is fortunate, which indicates that Yosef's failure was not so much in how much effort he made but in whom he invested his efforts.

The Chazon Ish (Rabbi Avraham Yeshaya Karelitz; 1878-1953) offers a different approach in line with this observation. He explains that asking an arrogant person such as the Egyptian minister is not considered effort at all, as it is unlikely to yield results. Rather, it is an act of desperation that reflects a lack of trust in G-d. A person must indeed make the proper effort to achieve his goals, explains that Chazon Ish, but that effort must have a reasonable chance of being successful. Yosef

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Stories for the Soul

Politics and Priorities

Rabbi Elazar Menachem Shach (1899-2001) advocated very strongly for Charedi Jews to vote in the Israeli elections. Rav Shach believed that this was how the Charedi population could work on getting their needs met by the Israeli government. During election season, it was not unusual for Rav Shach to order some yeshiva students to cut back on their Torah study and instead work on getting people to vote and other election-related needs. This seemed to show just how important he believed the elections were, as Rav Shach was very particular about not wasting time away from Torah study.

Yet, oddly, as soon as the elections were over, he would not only urge everyone back to the *bais medrash*, he would lament how much time had been wasted due to the elections, and would express that the time spent was simply not worth the loss of Torah study. This process repeated itself every election.

Rav Shach explained that there was no contradiction in his statements. Indeed, it was a great mitzvah to vote and to work on the election. This mitzvah was the obligation of the hour and had to be fulfilled. Stressing the importance of Torah study at that point would be counterproductive as it would diminish the enthusiasm for properly fulfilling the requirement of the moment. But when all was said and done, Torah study was far more important, even during the election time - and so Rav Shach would seek to reinforce the

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Kollel Happenings

TORAH FOR TYCOONS VIA ZOOM ON JAN 6

Torah for Tycoons resumes on Wed., Jan. 6 via Zoom. Please note time change for this class, 8-9 pm. Join Tuvia Harbater, Triage Analyst at Intellisecure, and Rabbi Mordechai Fleisher, Senior Educator for the Denver Community Kollel, for Hack Job: The Ethics of Hacking. Visit denverkollel.org or email info@denverkollel.org for more info.

LEGAL HOLIDAY LEARNING ON DECEMBER 25TH

Join Rabbi Chaim Yeshaya Freeman via Zoom on Friday, December 25th at 9:15 am for Above Suspicion: The Obligation to Avoid an Impression of Wrongdoing, an intriguing discussion about maras ayin and its application during this time of year. Visit denverkollel.org or email info@denverkollel.org for more info.

HELP BUILD THE FUTURE OF TORAH IN DENVER

Claim your part in building the future of Torah in Denver! The Kollel is in the midst of a capital campaign to build a three-story, state-of-the-art Torah Center that will serve the entire Denver Jewish community. To contribute, or for dedication opportunities and details on the building, visit denverkollel.org or email info@denverkollel.org.

Halacha Riddles

Last week we asked: What type of food will require a different blessing depending on one's intention when making it? Answer: According to some opinions, a bread-type item that is subsequently made into *pas haba'a bikisnin*. If the producer of the item intended that this be actual bread, it requires *hamotzi* even though it is later made into a *pas haba'a bikisnin*-type item. Conversely, if the producer intended to make *pas haba'a bikisnin*, it requires a *mezonos* (if not eaten as a meal, as discussed last week) even though it was regular bread at one point of its production. For example, bagel chips, pita chips or Melba toast are produced from bread-type items. Assuming the manufacturer made the

"bread" for the purpose of making the final cracker-type product, they are *mezonos*. If, however, one took regular bread and made Melba toast or the like, the final product is *hamotzi* since the item was originally produced to be regular bread.

It should be noted that there are those who disagree and say that any item that is made into bread and then further processed into *pas haba'a bikisnin* requires *hamotzi* (see Vivos Habracha 5761 ed. pg. 21). A qualified halachic authority should be consulted for a practical ruling.

This week's question: What type of food could have a different *bracha* depending on the local culture?

Lives of Our Torah Leaders

Rabbi Saadia Gaon - Part VIII

The Exilarch and Torah scholars of Babylonia sent letters entreating Rabbi Aharon ben Meir not to maintain his position, but he refused to accede to their request.

This disagreement, apart from the political crisis, also presented a

religious disaster, as Jews in the many communities of *Eretz Yisrael* and the Diaspora were confused as to whose calendar was correct. Having Jews in different places observe different dates for the holidays would create a terrible split and foster enormous confusion among world Jewry.

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was therefore punished for making *hishtadlus* that could not be considered a realistic investment of effort.

Practically speaking, there are these and other approaches to understanding what a person's obligations are when it

comes to the balance between *bitachon* and *hishtadlus*. Every person must create an individualized path that works for his situation and will allow him to grow in the proper trust in Hashem.

Stories for the Soul

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primacy of Torah study above all else immediately following the election.

Yosef was appointed as viceroy of Egypt, and he ended up managing the entire Egypt and the many foreigners who came to Egypt for food during the

famine. Throughout his time as a ruler, he constantly maintained priorities of what was important and what was not, balancing his responsibilities as a ruler of Egypt with his personal responsibilities to G-d.