

Kindly take a moment to study MISHNAS CHAYIM in the merit of  
*Zev ben Yissochor a”h*

a fellow Jew who passed away with no relatives to arrange Torah study on behalf of his *neshamah*

## Secret of Victory

## PARSHAS MIKEITZ 5777

We grappled last week with what appeared to be contradictory intimations about Yosef’s level of *bitachon* (reliance on Hashem). On the one hand, the Medrash (*Bereishis Rabbah* 89:3) seemed to praise him for his excellence in this area, applying to him the verse from Tehillim (40:5): אֲשֶׁרִי הַגִּבֹּר אֲשֶׁר־שָׁם הִי מִבְּטָחוֹ: – “Fortunate is the man who places his trust in Hashem.” On the other hand, the Medrash seems to fault him for asking Pharaoh’s chief butler to intervene on his behalf. This is what emerges from the Torah’s recounting, at the beginning of this week’s *parshah*, that another two years passed before Yosef’s release (*Bereishis* 41:1). The Medrash states that these two years of further incarceration resulted from Yosef’s double-phrased request of the butler. Was Yosef the epitome of *bitachon*? Or did he possess some deficiency in this attribute?

To resolve the apparent contradiction, we cited the Rashash’s explanation that, indeed, Yosef excelled in *bitachon*. It was specifically *because* he was so advanced in this area that he was held to account for even a slight deviation.

### No Need for Amends

According to others, however, the Medrash does not mean to place any blame on Yosef – not even in the slightest. An approach attributed to R’ Akiva Eiger states, in fact, that Yosef’s conversation with the chief butler was actually a manifestation of his attribute of *bitachon*.

This can be derived from the manner in which Yosef related the favorable news to the butler that Pharaoh was soon to recall him: בְּעוֹד שְׁלֹשֶׁת יָמִים יִשָּׂא פָרְעֹה אֶת־רֹאשׁוֹ וְהִשְׁיבָךָ עַל־כַּנֶּךָ וְנָתַתְּ – “In another three days, Pharaoh shall raise your head and return you to your post; and you shall place Pharaoh’s cup in his hand as was the original practice” (*Bereishis* 40:13). There appears to be a redundancy here. Yosef already stated that Pharaoh would “return you to your post.” Seemingly, the butler should understand what that would entail. Why, then, did Yosef feel it necessary to proceed to detail the nature of this task: “And you shall place Pharaoh’s cup in his hand as was the original practice.” Wasn’t all of that obvious?

R’ Akiva Eiger explains that Yosef was addressing a natural facet of human behavior. Imagine a person who is held to account and jailed for a particular crime; what would be going through his mind as he lingered in his cell and contemplated his fate? Most likely, he would be telling himself, with great conviction, how careful he would be in the future; something along the lines of: *If I ever get out of here, I’m going to make sure to not to repeat this behavior!* Thus, the butler must have been resolving how he would approach his task with such care and caution if he were ever to be granted a second chance. Never would he be derelict in his duties again.

What Yosef was really telling the butler was that such contemplations, in this case, were unnecessary. They would be appropriate only insofar as his misdeeds were the true cause of his incarceration. However, Yosef informed him that this was not what took place at all. Rather, the whole affair was Divinely orchestrated for a single purpose: “*Ki im zechartani – So that you remember me*” (*Ibid.* v. 14) and mention my name to Pharaoh. As such, Yosef told the butler, you need not worry or feel compelled to employ more care in the fulfillment of your duties; instead, simply perform them as you did originally – “*ka’mishpat harishon.*”

What emerges, then, is that instead of a lapse in *bitachon*, Yosef was actually lecturing the butler about Hashem's complete control of man's affairs! As to the two years he remained in jail, the *Chemdas Shlomo* understands that this was no punishment. Rather, this also played out to Yosef's ultimate benefit, as it set the stage for him to appear on the scene just when Pharaoh, two years later, would have his dream. This was the event that ultimately catapulted him to the zenith of greatness and leadership (*Peninim Mi'shulchan Gavohah, vol. I, pp. 193,200*).

### **Chariots and War**

There is another teaching of Chazal that should enable us to get a better sense of Yosef's achievements with respect to this attribute. The Mishnah states (*Avos 2:4*):

בְּטֵל רְצוֹנְךָ מִפְּנֵי רְצוֹנוֹ, כִּדְּי שֶׁיִּבְטֵל רְצוֹן אֲחֵרִים מִפְּנֵי רְצוֹנְךָ.

“Nullify your will in the face of His will, so that He will nullify the will of others (seeking your harm) in the face of your will.”

Indeed, the *Chovos Halevavos* (cited by the Rabbeinu Bechaye, introduction to *parshas Mikeitz*) characterizes *bitachon* in these very terms. He describes the very highest level of *bitachon* as one in which the individual “does not rely on any other factor and **whose only desire is that which Hashem wills for him...**” In other words, he completely nullifies himself to Hashem's will, totally secure in the knowledge that whatever He provides is ultimately the best.

The Zohar employs some curious imagery, referring to Yosef as a “*merkavah*” (chariot) upon which the Shechinah (Divine Presence) would rest. Of all items, why did Chazal choose to equate Yosef with a chariot? The comparison can be understood in light of the above. The Zohar is highlighting Yosef's mastery of *bitachon*; having reached the highest level in this area, he had completely nullified himself to Hashem. In this sense he was just like a chariot, which has no independent will or control, instead allowing itself to be led along to wherever its driver desires.

Interestingly enough, it appears that this was the very factor that effected the miraculous victory for the Chashmonaim in their battle against the Greeks. This was the war described in the Al Hanissim prayer as “*Rabbim b'yad me'atim* – Many in the hands of a few.” How, indeed, was it possible for the tiny Jewish force to prevail over the enemy's considerable army?

Chazal seem to suggest that it was this very attribute that was chiefly responsible. The Medrash Chanukah reports that prior to battle, Yehudah would instruct his fellow Chashmonaim to place their trust in Hashem. He would announce in a raised voice: “*La'Hashem hayeshu'ah* – Salvation belongs to Hashem!” They simply ignored the odds and nullified themselves to His will, displaying a readiness to sanctify His Name despite the obvious danger. And as we have seen from the Mishnah above, the consequences of this sentiment are quite salutary: When one nullifies his own will before that of Hashem, He, in turn, nullifies the will of one's enemies. In this way, then, the remarkable outcome of “*rabbim b'yad me'atim*” was achieved (*cf. Yerach L'mo'adim, Chanukah, part II, § 6*).

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