

Last week's Parsha concluded with Yosef languishing in jail waiting to be rescued from his sad predicament. He sought to capitalize on his favorable relationship with the butler who after spending time in jail with Yosef is reinstated to his former prominent position. However, it is not until two years later when Pharaoh experiences some troubling dreams that the butler remembers Yosef's unique ability to interpret dreams and suggests that the Pharaoh release Yosef from jail.

The Midrash, commenting on Yosef's interaction with the butler, quotes a verse in Psalms, 'Fortunate is the man that has made G-D his trust and has not turned to the arrogant'. The Midrash says, "Fortunate is the man that has made G-D his trust', this refers to Yosef, 'and has not turned to the arrogant,' because he said to the butler 'Remember me and mention my name,' two years were added on to his jail sentence." The words of the Midrash seem to contradict itself. On the one hand, the Midrash seems to praise Yosef as one who places his complete trust in G-D, one who is the paradigm for faith in G-D. Yet, in the very next line, the Midrash seems to indict Yosef for placing his faith in the arrogant, the butler. In fact, he is punished for lacking perfect faith and entrusting his well-being to the butler and not to G-D. Furthermore, it is strange that the Midrash should blame Yosef at all for his behavior. Was it wrong for Yosef to ask the butler to remember him? Is it really considered a lack of faith to ask to be remembered? Aren't we expected to do all that we can to ensure our survival? Are we really supposed to sit around and expect G-D to work miracles?

The Gerrer Rebbe (R. Yitzchak Meir Alter) explains that G-D does not treat everyone equally, in fact much like a company in the work force where the top executives are expected to produce at a much higher clip than their lower salaried colleagues, G-D operates the world in a similar vein. He expects more from those with loftier souls. Yosef was a paragon of a faithful believer in G-D. He was the living definition of the verse "Fortunate is the man that has made G-D his trust." Few people in our entire religious literature can rival his conviction in G-D. Yet, precisely because of his unquestionable faith, there was also an expectation that he never waver even slightly in that faith. There should never be any cause of condemnation of his faith. However, when he asked the butler for help, when he put his trust in a mere mortal, for Yosef's standard that was an appalling affront to G-D. How could Yosef suddenly lack faith and turn to the butler for help? This is the meaning of the cryptic Midrash. Fortunate is the man who trusts G-D, this is Yosef who had reached unparalleled levels of faith. However, that level of faith also comes with expectations and consequences. For him, there is a consequence just for asking the butler for help.

Ultimately, Yosef's shortcoming lay in the fact that he was so much greater than us. We must make every effort to ensure that we are successful, we have no right to leave things up to G-D without doing everything to insure our success. If G-D forbid we were in Yosef's predicament, we would be mandated to do everything possible to save ourselves. Unlike Yosef who was punished for asking the butler to remember him, our sin would be failing to ask the butler to remember us.

The lesson of this Midrash is not that we should act like Yosef, but that there are people like Yosef. That we have heroes in our faith who are so faithful, that asking to be remembered is considered a sin is a remarkable statement and should serve as an inspiration for us all.

*Shabbat Shalom
Chanukah Sameach*

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