

טעמו וראו

A taste of the
Rebbe's teachings

Vayeshev



>>

The Correct Approach to Faith

Joseph is sent to prison on a baseless accusation. When he asks Pharaoh's cupbearer to secure his release, G-d punishes him with two more years of imprisonment.

Why? Was he wrong for taking advantage of this opportunity? What is the correct balance between faith and self-sufficiency?

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Part 1 - Joseph's Opportunity

Source 1

Joseph is thrown into prison.

Bireishit 39:7-20



After some time, the wife of Joseph's master cast her eyes on him. "Sleep with me," she said.

He adamantly refused. He reasoned with his master's wife, "Look, my master does not even know what I do in the house. He entrusted me with everything he owns. No one in this house has more power than I have. He has not kept back anything at all from me, except for you, his wife. How could I do such a great wrong? It would be a sin before G-d!"

She spoke to Joseph every day, but he would not pay attention to her. He would not even lie next to her or spend time with her.

One such day, Joseph came to the house to do his work. None of the household staff was inside. She grabbed him by his cloak. "Sleep with me," she pleaded. He ran away from her, leaving his cloak in her hand, and fled outside.

When she realized that he had left his cloak in her hand and fled outside, she called her household servants. "See!" she said. "He brought us a Hebrew man to play games with us! He came to assault me, but I screamed as loud as I could! When he heard me scream and call for help, he ran outside and left his cloak with me!"

She kept Joseph's cloak with her until his master came home, and she told him the same story. "The Hebrew slave that you brought us came to play games with me! When I screamed and called for help, he fled outside, leaving his cloak with me!"

חומש בראשית, פרק לט פסוקים ז' - כ'

ז וַיְהִי אַחֲרֵי הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה
וַתִּשָּׂא אִשָּׁת אֲדֹנָיו אֶת עֵינֶיהָ
אֶל-יֹסֵף וַתֹּאמֶר שְׁכַבָּה עִמִּי:
ח וַיִּמָּאֵן וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל אִשָּׁת אֲדֹנָיו
הֵן אֲדֹנִי לֹא-יָדַע אֶתִּי מָה בַּבַּיִת
וְכָל אֲשֶׁר-יִשְׁלוּ נָתַן בְּיָדִי: ט
אֵינְנוּ גְדוֹל בַּבַּיִת הַזֶּה מִמֶּנִּי וְלֹא-
חֲשַׁךְ מִמֶּנִּי מְאוּמָּה כִּי אִם-אוֹתְךָ
בְּאִשְׁרֵי אֶתְ-אִשְׁתּוֹ וְאִיךָ אֶעֱשֶׂה
הַרְעָה הַגְּדֹלָה הַזֹּאת וְחָטָאתִי
לְאֱלֹהִים: י וַיְהִי כַּדְּבָרָה אֵל יוֹסֵף
יוֹם יוֹם וְלֹא שָׁמַע אֵלָיָהּ לְשֹׁכֵב
אֶצְלָהּ לְהִיּוֹת עִמָּה: יא וַיְהִי
כַּהַיּוֹם הַזֶּה וַיָּבֵא הַבַּיִתָּה לַעֲשׂוֹת
מִלֵּאכְתּוֹ וְאִין אִישׁ מֵאֲנָשֵׁי הַבַּיִת
שָׁם בַּבַּיִת: יב וַתִּתְּפֹשֶׂהוּ בְּבִגְדוֹ
לֵאמֹר שְׁכַבָּה עִמִּי וַיַּעֲזֹב בְּגָדוֹ
בְּיָדָהּ וַיָּנֶס וַיֵּצֵא הַחוּצָה: יג וַיְהִי
כַּרְאוֹתָהּ כִּי-עֲזַב בְּגָדוֹ בְּיָדָהּ וַיָּנֶס
הַחוּצָה: יד וַתִּקְרָא לְאֲנָשֵׁי בֵּיתָהּ
וַתֹּאמֶר לָהֶם לֵאמֹר רְאוּ הֵבִיא
לָנוּ אִישׁ עִבְרִי לְצַחֵק בָּנוּ בָּא
אֵלַי לְשֹׁכֵב עִמִּי וְאֶקְרָא בְּקוֹל
גְּדוֹל: טו וַיְהִי כְשָׁמְעוּ כִּי-הִרִימָתִי
קוֹלִי וְאֶקְרָא וַיַּעֲזֹב בְּגָדוֹ אֶצְלִי
וַיָּנֶס וַיֵּצֵא הַחוּצָה: טז וַתִּנַּח בְּגָדוֹ
אֶצְלָהּ עַד-בּוֹא אֲדֹנָיו אֶל-בֵּיתוֹ:
יז וַתִּדְבֹר אֵלָיו כַּדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה
לֵאמֹר בָּא-אֵלַי הָעֶבֶד הָעִבְרִי
אֲשֶׁר-הֵבֵאתָ לָנוּ לְצַחֵק בִּי: יח
וַיְהִי כַּהִרְיָמִי קוֹלִי וְאֶקְרָא וַיַּעֲזֹב
בְּגָדוֹ אֶצְלִי וַיָּנֶס הַחוּצָה: יט וַיְהִי
כְשָׁמַע אֲדֹנָיו אֶת-דְּבָרֵי אִשְׁתּוֹ
אֲשֶׁר דְּבָרָה אֵלָיו לֵאמֹר כַּדְּבָרִים

When her husband heard his wife's story and her description of the incident, he became furious. Joseph's master had him arrested and placed him in the dungeon where the king's prisoners were kept. He was to remain in that dungeon.

הָאֵלֶּה עָשָׂה לִי עַבְדְּךָ וַיַּחַר אָפוֹ:
כ וַיִּקַּח אֲדֹנָי יוֹסֵף אֹתוֹ וַיִּתְּנֶהוּ
אֶל-בֵּית הַסֵּהַר מְקוֹם אֲשֶׁר-
אֲסִירֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ אֲסוּרִים וַיְהִי-שָׁם
בְּבֵית הַסֵּהַר:

Source 2

Pharaoh's cupbearer and baker are thrown into prison. They each have a dream which Joseph interprets satisfactorily. He predicts that the cupbearer will be released and reinstated to his position. He asks him to bring up his case before Pharaoh and tell him that he was imprisoned on false allegations.

Genesis 40:1-15

חומש בראשית, פרק מ' פסוקים א' – ט"ו



Soon after this, Pharaoh's cupbearer and baker offended their master, the king of Egypt.

א וַיְהִי אַחֲרֵי הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה
חָטְאוּ מִשְׁקָה מְלָךְ-מִצְרַיִם
וְהָאֶפֶה לְאֲדֹנֵיהֶם לְמֶלֶךְ מִצְרַיִם:

רש"י על הפסוק

Soon after this: so that relief would come to the righteous man through them.

רש"י על הפסוק

אחר הדברים האלה. שֶׁתִּבְאֶה
הַרְוָחָה לְצַדִּיק עַל יְדֵיהֶם:

Pharaoh was incensed at his two courtiers, the cupbearer and the baker, and he had them arrested. They were placed in the house of the captain of the guard, in the same dungeon where Joseph was imprisoned. They were under arrest for a long period of time, and the captain assigned Joseph to look after them.

ב וַיִּקְצַף פַּרְעֹה עַל שְׁנֵי סְרִיסָיו
עַל שֶׁר הַמִּשְׁקִים וְעַל שֶׁר
הָאוֹפִים: ג וַיִּתֵּן אֹתָם בְּמִשְׁמַר
בֵּית שֶׁר הַטְּבָחִים אֶל-בֵּית
הַסֵּהַר מְקוֹם אֲשֶׁר יוֹסֵף אֲסוּר
שָׁם: ד וַיִּפְקֹד שֶׁר הַטְּבָחִים אֶת-
יוֹסֵף אֹתָם וַיִּשְׁרֹת אֹתָם וַיְהִי
יָמִים בְּמִשְׁמַר: ה וַיַּחְלְמוּ חֲלוֹם
שְׁנֵיהֶם אִישׁ חֲלָמוֹ בְּלַיְלָה אֶחָד
אִישׁ כְּפִתְרוֹן חֲלָמוֹ הַמִּשְׁקָה
וְהָאֶפֶה אֲשֶׁר לְמֶלֶךְ מִצְרַיִם
אֲשֶׁר אֲסוּרִים בְּבֵית הַסֵּהַר: ו
וַיָּבֹא אֲלֵיהֶם יוֹסֵף בְּבֹקֶר וַיִּרְא
אֹתָם וְהֵנָּם זֹעֲפִים: ז וַיִּשְׁאַל
אֶת-סְרִיסָיו פַּרְעֹה אֲשֶׁר אֹתוֹ
בְּמִשְׁמַר בֵּית אֲדֹנָיו לֵאמֹר מַדּוּעַ
פָּנִיכֶם רָעִים הַיּוֹם: ח וַיֹּאמְרוּ
אֵלָיו חֲלוֹם חֲלָמְנוּ וּפְתָר אֵין
אֹתוֹ וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵיהֶם יוֹסֵף הֲלוֹא
לֹאֵלֵהֶם פְּתָרָנִים סִפְרוּ-נָא לִי:

One night, the two of them dreamed. The Egyptian king's cupbearer and baker, who were imprisoned in the dungeon, each had a dream that seemed to have a special meaning. When Joseph came to them in the morning, he saw that they were upset. He tried to find out what was wrong with Pharaoh's courtiers who were his fellow prisoners in his master's house. "Why do you look so worried today?" he asked.

"We each had a dream," they replied, "and there is no one here to interpret it."

"Interpretations are G-d's business," replied Joseph. "If you want to, tell me about your dreams."

The cupbearer related his dream to Joseph. “In my dream,” he said, “there was a great vine right there in front of me. The vine had three branches. As soon as its buds formed, its blossoms bloomed and its clusters ripened into grapes. Pharaoh's cup was in my hand. I took the grapes and squeezed them into Pharaoh's cup. Then I placed the cup in Pharaoh's hand.”

Joseph said to him, “This is the interpretation. The three branches are three days. In three days, Pharaoh will lift your head and give you back your position. You will place Pharaoh's cup in his hand, just as you did before, when you were his steward. But when things go well for you, just remember that I was with you. Do me a favor and say something about me to Pharaoh. Perhaps you will be able to get me out of this place. I was originally kidnapped from the land of the Hebrews, and when I came here, I did not do anything to deserve being thrown in the dungeon.”

Source 3

Joseph's interpretation comes true, and the cupbearer is reinstated. However, he forgets Joseph's request. G-d punishes Joseph, and he remains in prison for another two years.

Genesis 40:20-23



The third day was Pharaoh's birthday, and he made a feast for all his servants. Among his servants, he gave special attention to the cupbearer and baker. He restored the cupbearer to his position and allowed him to place the cup in Pharaoh's hand. The baker, however, was hanged, just as Joseph had predicted. The cupbearer did not remember Joseph. He forgot all about him.

Rashi on the verse

And he forgot all about him: afterwards. Because Joseph relied on him to remember him, he was forced to remain confined for two years, as it is said: “Praiseworthy is the man who made the L-rd his trust and did not turn to the haughty (רְהָבִים) – who did not rely on the Egyptians, who are called רְהָבִים, haughty.

ט וַיְסַפֵּר שֶׁר־הַמְּשָׁקִים אֶת־
חַלְמוֹ לְיוֹסֵף וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ בְּחִלּוֹמֵי
וְהִנֵּה־גִפְנוֹ לְפָנָי: י וּבִגְפוֹן שְׁלִשָּׁה
שָׁרִיגִם וְהִיא כְּפֶרֶחַת עֲלֵתָהּ
נֹצֵה הַבָּשִׁילוֹ אֲשַׁכְּלֵתֶיהָ עֲנָבִים:
יא וְכֹס פְּרֻעָה בְּיָדִי וְאָקַח אֶת־
הָעֲנָבִים וְאֶשְׁחַט אֹתָם אֶל־כֹּס
פְּרֻעָה וְאָתָּן אֶת־הַכֹּס עַל־כַּף
פְּרֻעָה: יב וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ יוֹסֵף זֶה
פְּתָרְנוֹ שְׁלֹשֶׁת הַשָּׁרָגִים שְׁלֹשֶׁת
יָמִים הֵם: יג בְּעוֹד שְׁלֹשֶׁת יָמִים
יִשָּׂא פְּרֻעָה אֶת־רֹאשְׁךָ וְהִשִּׁיבְךָ
עַל־כַּנְךָ וְנָתַתָּ כֹּס־פְּרֻעָה בְּיָדוֹ
כַּמְשָׁפֵט הָרֹאשׁוֹן אֲשֶׁר הָיִיתָ
מִשְׁקֵהוּ: יד כִּי אִם־זָכַרְתָּנִי אֶתְךָ
כְּאֲשֶׁר יִיטַב לְךָ וְעָשִׂיתָ־נָא
עִמָּדִי חֶסֶד וְהִזְכַּרְתָּנִי אֶל־פְּרֻעָה
וְהוֹצֵאתָנִי מִזֶּה־בַיִת הַזֶּה: טו כִּי־
גָּנַב גָּנַבְתִּי מֵאֶרֶץ הָעֵבְרִים וְגַם־
פֹּה לֹא־עָשִׂיתִי מְאוּמָה כִּי־שָׂמוּ
אֹתִי בַּבּוֹר:

חומש בראשית פרק מ' פסוקים כ"ג-כ"ג

כ וַיְהִי בַיּוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי יוֹם הַלְּדָתָהּ
אֶת־פְּרֻעָה וַיַּעַשׂ מִשְׁתֶּה לְכָל־
עַבְדָּיו וַיִּשָּׂא אֶת־רֹאשׁ שֶׁר
הַמְּשָׁקִים וְאֶת־רֹאשׁ שֶׁר הָאֲפִים
בְּתוֹךְ עַבְדָּיו: כא וַיִּשָּׁב אֶת־שֶׁר
הַמְּשָׁקִים עַל־מִשְׁקָהוּ וַיִּתֵּן הַכֹּס
עַל־כַּף פְּרֻעָה: כג וְלֹא־זָכַר שֶׁר־
הַמְּשָׁקִים אֶת־יוֹסֵף וַיִּשְׁכַּחְהוּ:

רש"י על הפסוק

וישכחהו. לאחר מפאן. מפני
שתלה בו יוסף לזכרו, הזקק
להיות אסור שתי שנים, שנאמר
אשרי הגבר אשר שם ה' מבטחו
ולא פנה אל רהבים (תהילים מ')
ולא בטח על מצרים, הקרויים
רהב:

Part 2 - Why Was Joseph Punished?

Excerpt from Shabbat Parshat Vayeshev (1982)

Should You Seek to Better Your Own Condition?



The Torah says that “The cupbearer did not remember Joseph. He forgot all about him.” Rashi explains, “Because Joseph relied on him to remember him, he was forced to remain confined for two years, as it is said: ‘Praiseworthy is the man who made the L-rd his trust and did not turn to the haughty’ – i.e. who did not rely on the Egyptians, who are called haughty.”¹

The following question arises:

At the beginning of the segment in the Torah, the verse states, “Soon after this, Pharaoh’s cupbearer and baker offended their master, the king of Egypt.”² Rashi notes, “Because that cursed woman (Potiphar’s wife) had accustomed the people to talk badly about the righteous man (Joseph), therefore G-d brought about the sin of these men, so that the Egyptians would turn their attention to the two couriers and not to Joseph, and also so that relief would come to the righteous man through them.”

Clearly, G-d orchestrated the events in a fashion that the cupbearer and baker would find themselves in prison together with Joseph, “so that relief would come to the righteous man through them.” Indeed, as the Torah continues to explain, the cupbearer was the one who introduced Joseph to Pharaoh as one who could interpret his dreams, thereby leading to his release from prison.

There seems to be a contradiction between Rashi’s words at the beginning and end of the topic. At the outset, Rashi says that they were imprisoned in order to facilitate the release of Joseph. And if Joseph understood that they were there for his release, it is quite reasonable that he asked them

1) Genesis, 40:23

2) Genesis 40:1.

to intercede with Pharaoh on his behalf.

Seemingly, had Joseph not asked to be released, he would have risked squandering the opportunity that G-d had placed squarely before him, and G-d's 'orchestration' would have been for naught!

Thus, Rashi's final words – that Joseph was punished with an additional two years for placing his trust in the cupbearer – are difficult to understand. Why was it considered a sin to ask for his intercession? The whole purpose of the cupbearer's imprisonment was to bring salvation to Joseph. Was he not obligated to act accordingly!?

Pull Connections, But Trust in G-d

The explanation:

The reason Joseph was punished with an additional two years in his imprisonment – despite the fact that the cupbearer was there for his sake – lies in the exact wording of Rashi, “Because Joseph relied on him to remember him.”

In the continuation of Rashi's explanation, he cites a verse from Psalms, “Praiseworthy is the man who made the L-rd his trust and did not turn to the haughty.” Seemingly, Rashi could have chosen to use the same terminology, “Joseph turned to the cupbearer to remember him.” Nonetheless, Rashi uses the Hebrew word “תלה–Joseph relied on the cupbearer.”

The Hebrew word תלה means to rely and depend on the subject. In other words, Joseph saw his release from imprisonment as dependent on the cupbearer's intercession before Pharaoh. If he would intercede, Joseph felt he would be released, but if not, he would remain imprisoned.

This was Joseph's sin: he depended on the cupbearer for his release, as if he wielded control over his destiny.

In other words, Joseph was obligated to pursue his release and ask the cupbearer to mention him to Pharaoh. Indeed, that was the reason the cupbearer ended up in prison altogether. However, he should have done so with the recognition that the ultimate result lies in G-d's hands, and not in the deeds of the cupbearer. Thus, Rashi wrote, "Because Joseph relied on him to remember him, he was forced to remain in prison for two years."

Now we can understand why Rashi cited the entire length of the verse, "Praiseworthy is the man who made the L-rd his trust and did not turn to the haughty."³ His intent is to emphasize Joseph's mistake – that he depended on a person of flesh and blood instead of placing his trust in G-d.

Shabbat Vayeshev 5743 (1982).
Toras Menachem 5743 vol. 2 pg. 697.

Source 4

This message about the proper balance between faith and activism is actually in the Talmud.

Tractate Niddah 70b



The wise men of Alexandria asked, "What should a person do to become wealthy?"

Rabbi Joshua said to them, "He should increase his time involved in merchandise and conduct his business faithfully."

The wise men replied, "Many people have done so, and it did not help them become rich."

Rabbi Joshua answered, "Rather, they should pray for mercy to receive wisdom from the One to Whom wealth belongs, as it is stated: 'Mine is the silver, and Mine the gold, says the L-rd of hosts.'" (Chaggai 2:8).

[The Talmud asks:] Since the path to wealth is through prayer, what is Rabbi Joshua teaching us when he says that one should increase his time spent involved in merchandise and conduct his business faithfully?

[The Talmud answers:] Rabbi Joshua is teaching that prayer without being involved in honest business does not suffice.

מסכת נדה דף ע"ב

שאלו חכמי אלכסנדריה את רבי יהושע: מה יעשה אדם ויתעשר? אמר להן: ירבה בסחורה, וישא ויתן באמונה. אמרו לו (בשאלה): הרבה עשו כן ולא הועילו! (חזר רבי יהושע ואמר להם:) אלא יבקש רחמים ממי שהעושר שלו, שנאמר "לי הכסף ולי הזהב" (חגי ב, ח). מאי קמשמע לן? דהא בלא הא לא סגי! (מה בא רבי יהושע להשמיע בשנית? - שתפילה ללא עיסוק במסחר אינה מספיקה כדי להעשיר, ולהפך. ושניהם נדרשים במידה שווה).

Source 5

The Tzemach Tzedek, the third Chabad Rebbe, asks in his work Derech Mitzvotecha, "Why must a person work at all?" He explains, "We channel G-d's blessing through our efforts."

Derech Mitzvotecha, Tiglachat Metzora pg. 107



...On this basis, we can thoroughly appreciate the reason business activity is necessary to earn one's livelihood. For the influence that enters our world must pass through the garments of nature. G-d's influence becomes encloded, hidden, and concealed to the extent that it appears that the

דרך מצוותיך, מצוות תגלחת מצורע עמוד ק"ז

למה שנצרך העסק במשא ומתן לצורך פרנסה?

...כי השפע בעולם הזה נמשכת דרך לבוש הטבע, פירוש, שהיא מתלבשת ומתעלמת ומסתתרת עד שנראה כאילו עולם במנהגו

world is following its own independent pattern, conforming to the natural order.

In truth, everything comes from G-d, in His glory and His essence, but He conceals His G-dly influence so much that on a revealed level, the daily flow of events does not appear miraculous or beyond the natural order. Instead, it appears as if everything is natural.

For example, when G-d grants sustenance to a Jew to satisfy his needs, He does not grant it to him through a miracle: manna does not descend from heaven nor does bread or meat, as was the case with regard to the Jews in the desert. That was unnatural. Instead, in the present age, He sends His blessings in a way that enables a person to earn profit through commerce and business activity...

Now, the profit he makes through this business activity comes about through natural means. Thus, it is possible for him to say, "It is my strength and the power of my hand that achieved this wealth for me," and "My wisdom stood by me." He may think: "My business knowledge, knowing what to buy and when to sell and the like, was what brought about the profit." ...

In truth, however, it is written (Ecclesiastes 9:11): "Bread will not accrue to the wise," but instead to one to whom G-d will decree and ordain His blessing. Through His providence, He ordains who will be poor or wealthy; He lowers and He raises the status of people at will. Nevertheless, He grants His influence through the natural order alone.

נוהג (ב)דרך הטבע. ובאמת, הכל בא מהשם יתברך בכבודו ובעצמו, אלא שהוא מסתיר שפע אלהותו כל כך עד שלא יראה בגילוי דבר ניסי ויוצא מנהג העולם, כי אם שיראה הכל כאילו הוא דבר טבעי.

למשל: כשנותן פרנסה לאיש הישראלי די סיפוקו, אינו נותן לו על-ידי נס כמו שיוריד לו מן השמים לחם ובשר כמו לאוכלי המן, שזהו דבר בלתי טבעי. אלא הוא שולח ברכתו שירויה זה במשא-ומתן בעסק.

והנה, הריוח שעל-ידי משא-ומתן הוא דבר טבעי. . . שיכול האומר לומר 'כוחי ועוצם ידי עשה לי את כל החיל הזה, וחכמתי עמדה לי שידעתי בטוב המסחר מה לקנות, ואימתי למכור'...

ובאמת - "לא לחכמים לחם" כתיב (קהלת ט, יא), אלא לאשר יצוה ה' ברכתו ויגזור בהשגחתו: מוריש ומעשיר, משפיל ומרומם. אלא שאינו נותן שפעו כי-אם על-ידי לבוש הטבע הנזכר לעיל..."

