

"AND IT CAME TO PASS AT THE END OF TWO YEARS..."
(BEREISHIS 41:1)

YOSEF CORRECTLY INTERPRETED his cell-mate's dream, predicting that he would be reinstated to his royal position of chief butler. Yosef asked him to use his influence to obtain Yosef's release from prison. Rashi (Bereishis 40:23) tells us that because of this breach of *bitachon* – trust in Hashem, Yosef languished in the dungeon for another two years; he should not have asked for the butler's assistance.

Why was Yosef punished so severely?

Why was Yosef punished so severely? Wasn't he merely doing his part to save himself? Furthermore, we know the tremendous stature of Yosef, who passed many difficult tests of faith in Hashem; could he have been deficient in *bitachon*?

The *baalei mussar* tell us that the greatest distance in the human body is not from the head to the toe but from the brain to the heart. There are many facts and ideas that we understand intellectually but do not actually feel on a deeper, emotional level.

This intellectual knowledge did not fully penetrate

Undoubtedly, Yosef knew and understood that nothing in this world is happenstance, that no heart beats for even a single second without Divine command. Nevertheless, this intellectual knowledge did not fully penetrate to the innermost chambers of his heart, and on that emotional level, his trust in Hashem was not as complete as it should have been. The result of this imperfection was a slight fear regarding his fate in prison. This fear, in turn, clouded his intellectual perception and judgment, causing him to overestimate the sincerity and moral character of the butler. Had Yosef not feared remaining incarcerated, he would have realized that his cell-mate was not one to be trusted and was therefore the wrong emissary to use in pursuing his freedom.

The Midrash (Bereishis Rabbah 79:6) cites a similar example: R. Shimon bar Yochai fled the Romans and took refuge in a cave where he continued studying Torah, sustained miraculously by Hashem, for thirteen years. Finally, he came to the entrance of the cave and spied a man hunting fowl. Whenever R. Shimon bar Yochai heard a voice from heaven saying, "mercy!" the birds escaped. When the voice declared, "death!" the quarry was caught. Upon seeing this, he reflected to himself, "If a bird is not ensnared without heavenly decree, how much more so a human." No longer did he feel the need to hide from the authorities. He left the cave to find the Roman edict rescinded.

Why did this incident change R. Shimon bar Yochai's mind and cause him to leave the safety of his cave? Didn't he already have a tremendous degree of faith in Hashem, living miraculously off His kindness for thirteen years?

This episode served as a type of audio-visual aid

This episode served as a type of audio-visual aid to give R. Shimon bar Yochai an even greater understanding of *bitachon*. Once he reached a more perfect realization of Hashem's omnipotence, his mind became clearer and his vision sharper. He now saw that his decision to remain in the cave was mistaken and clouded by emotional factors. If we look around and see the everyday miracles of life surrounding us, we too can grow to towering heights of trust in Hashem.