

# Mussar HaTorah

Torah Insights into Human Nature – Dedicated in memory of Rabbi A. Henach Leibowitz zt"l

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Parashas Mekeitz

“AND PHARAOH SAID TO YOSEF, ‘SEE I HAVE PLACED YOU OVER THE ENTIRE LAND OF EGYPT.’” (BEREISHIS 41:41)

AS PHARAOH INSTALLS Yosef as viceroy over the entire Egyptian empire, he makes the statement quoted above. The S’forno explains this exhortation to Yosef regarding his new responsibilities to mean: “Perceive and consider well to lead in the best way possible, because I have placed a great matter in your hands.” Pharaoh was warning Yosef to use his faculties well to make the necessary decisions to save Egypt from famine and possible starvation.

***The statement seems superfluous, and almost silly***

If we think about the situation, the statement seems superfluous, and almost silly. Let us imagine a man afflicted with a health problem that prevents him from sleeping at night. He goes to one doctor after another, and to every specialist he can find, but no one can diagnose the condition. Finally he’s told of a doctor who is highly intelligent and insightful, with a perfect track record at successfully diagnosing similar problems. The man goes to the doctor, who immediately diagnoses the problem correctly, and explains it as a symptom of a major, life-threatening illness. Without even pausing for a response the doctor instantly proposes a straightforward procedure, brilliant in its simplicity, that will certainly cure the illness. The man is so impressed by the genius of this doctor that he asks him on the spot to be his personal physician and to perform the procedure as soon as possible. The man then turns to the doctor, looks him in the eye and warns him, “Doctor, make sure you figure this out properly!” We would laugh at such a comment – look who you are talking to, and don’t tell the world’s leading expert to make sure he thinks carefully.

After all the wise men of Egypt failed, Yosef was the one who interpreted the dreams correctly and warned Pharaoh about the impending famine. Yosef was the one who took the initiative to devise a brilliant plan to save Egypt from starvation. Yosef was recognized by Pharaoh as being the most wise and discerning person in the entire land of Egypt. Why would Pharaoh feel the need to charge Yosef at this point to “think things through well”?

***Success does not only depend on intelligence***

Success does not only depend on intelligence. The most gifted intellect, even when combined with clear knowledge of the problem at hand and a desire to help, doesn’t guarantee that a person will devise the proper solution. Yosef obviously knew what was at stake and what needed to be done. However, Pharaoh understood human nature. He knew that Yosef needed more than just the simple knowledge that the Egyptian empire was at stake. Yosef needed to feel it in the innermost depths of his being. Pharaoh realized that if Yosef lacked this visceral understanding of the situation, his actions could fall short of the mark. In order for Yosef to properly perceive the situation, Pharaoh correctly asked Yosef to fully contemplate the situation and to feel it deep in his consciousness. Only then could he be sure his decisions would accurate and effective.

***When we want to help others, it is important to apply this principle***

When we want to help others, it is important to apply this principle. Even if we are intelligent, sincere and well-intentioned, if we don’t expend the effort to feel the needs of the other person and the gravity of his situation, we may not make the best decisions. If we bring his situation to a level of emotional reality through contemplation, we can act with confidence that our minds and hearts will work together, to successfully implement the most effective and proper remedy to help our fellow man.