



ארגון רבני צהר



הסתדרות הציונית העולמית
המערך לשירותים רוחניים בתפוצות

Parashat Miketz

Wise Man or Understanding Man?

-Rabbanit Dr. Tova Ganzel-

In parashat Miketz we are introduced to the nature of the ideal leader by way of Pharaoh's call to Yosef to interpret Pharaoh's dreams. Yosef does not end his speech with his interpretation of the dreams (Bereishit 41:32), but rather takes advantage of his audience with Pharaoh to provide Pharaoh with some unsolicited practical advice. This is the moment at which Pharaoh and his counsel are provided with their first glimpse of Yosef's qualities of leadership.

In doing so, Yosef mentions the quality most basic in a leader: "seek out an understanding and wise man" (Bereishit 41:33). The commentators on the Torah distinguish between these two distinct qualities. Wisdom is possessed by those who can "contemplate objects in their essence and constitution," while a man of understanding is one who has the ability to "take a deeper view into the matter of things ... to reach conclusions based on the behavioral trends and characteristics of at least two given elements, to understand one thing from another ..." (according to the interpretation of Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch, his son Yaakov and others). Yosef's advice fell on attentive ears, as his words were wise and discerning in and of themselves, and thus Pharaoh accepted Yosef's suggestion and responded in the manner that Yosef himself would have wanted:

"So Pharaoh said to his servants, "Will we find [anyone] like this, a man in whom there is the spirit of God?" (Bereishit 41:38). Pharaoh's question "will we find" can be understood in two ways: first, has there ever been, in history, such a person who embodied these qualities of leadership? Based on this understanding, Pharaoh was expressing doubt as to whether such a figure could actually be found, since no such person had actually ever existed. However, it appears that the second understanding better describes Pharaoh's question: will we now be able to find the appropriate individual (this is in fact the interpretation suggested by Onkelos, upon whom Rashi based his own commentary. Ramban understood the text this way as well).

Pharaoh even adds his own understanding of Yosef's suggestion. He adds that the primary quality required by the desired individual is the "spirit of God," which itself is open to interpretation. True leaders display extraordinary God given talents. The pagan advisors who surrounded Pharaoh likely assumed that the "god" whose "spirit" Pharaoh was referring to was one of the deities worshipped by the Egyptians, but they accepted Yosef's suggestion as it was formulated by Pharaoh – that the qualities of "wisdom" and "understanding" are attributed to a "spirit of God"; they are not dependent on the actions of an individual, but rather are imbued in a person from above.

The wisdom of King Solomon at the beginning of his reign was also described in this manner by Hashem Himself: "I have given you a wise and understanding heart" (I Kings 3:12), and was recognized as such by the people: "for they saw that the wisdom of God (was) in him to do judgment" (I Kings



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3:28). It appears that these qualities are what granted King Solomon the ability to stabilize his reign, build the Temple and bring prosperity to the people of Israel. At the same time, people maintain freedom of choice. Having the qualities described above is not a guarantee of success, and King Solomon's actions toward the end of his reign demonstrate that one must constantly strive toward positive goals in order to avoid temptation and maintain a connection with his or her "spirit of God." Indeed, Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch, in his commentary *ad loc*, describes the unique qualities that must present in a leader: "It was necessary for them to understand how to provide for themselves under the circumstances that presented themselves. In order to achieve this objective, they first needed to identify a person with the qualities of understanding and insight. Afterward, they would be able to reach the appropriate conclusions based on wisdom and appropriate assessment of the situation."

I suggest that our parasha highlights the qualities that we must identify when selecting a leader: he or she must be wise and understanding, and it must be clear that such qualities are of an internal, even spiritual, nature. We must put great effort into finding such a person, and once found, we must hope that he or she succeeds over the long term in remembering from where he or she came and for what purpose he or she achieved his or her position of leadership.

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