YOSEF, and his success. # 4. HOW TO SEE THE FUTURE?

No. 4. HOW TO SEE THE FUTURE?

During the last days, I wrote about Yosef and the secrets of his success. We mentioned his patience, his self-esteem and his proactivity. Today I'm going to write about his vision of the future. Later on, we will explore two more elements: Yosef's integrity and ultimately Yosef's Emuna. These six personality traits made of Yosef a role model for us all, his descendants.

What does a Jewish "vision of the future" mean?

I think this is one of the least appreciated elements in the story of Yosef. Let's see…

Pharaoh dreamed of seven fat cows being devoured by seven skinny cows. But the skinny cows remained skinny, even after having devoured the fat cows. And so happened with seven ears of wheat as well. Pharaoh sought someone to interpret his dream, and the Torah says □□□□□ □□□□ □□□□ □□□□ "And there was no one who interpreted Pharaoh's dreams." Does this mean that no one was able to interpret Pharaoh's dreams? This is what most people think.

But there is another possibility. Actually, the interpretation of the dream of the Egyptian monarch was more than obvious. Egypt's cattle industry, cows, and Egypt's agriculture, ears of wheat, will collapse. But, if the interpretation of Pharaoh's dream was so obvious, why none of the court's wizards approached Pharaoh and interpreted his dream?

Perhaps what happened was not that no one was *able* to interpreting Pharaoh's dreams, but no one *wanted* to bring Pharaoh the bad news: that after seven years of wealth, Egypt will end in bankruptcy. Who would dare giving these horrible news to Pharaoh?

First, because Pharaoh could react very badly and "shoot the messenger".

But there's more. Something much deeper. The court's soothsayers understood that Pharaoh's prophetic dreams conveyed an inevitable fate awaiting Egypt. The soothsayers were futuristic-fatalists, and thought that the future cannot

be altered.
Here comes the genius of Yosef and his “Jewish wisdom”. For Yosef the future is not written in stone. The future is not static, it is dynamic. It can be changed. When the prophets of Israel spoke to the people about the future, and for example, prophesied that the Bet haMiqdash was going to be destroyed, they were not transmitting an unchangeable prophetic vision, they were warning about the future consequences of the misdeeds of the people of Israel. And thus, they called the people to do Teshuba, repentance, because they knew that “the future” is in men’s hands. The realization of that bad prophecy could be avoided.
The same happened with King Hizquia, who despite the prophecy of Yesha’ayahu Hanabi, saying that the King would die, prayed to HaShem and was cured.
Unlike Jewish society, where it is understood that the future can be changed by God or by men, in pagan society omens, prophetic dreams and oracles convey an “unalterable” vision of the future. For the diviners of Pharaoh, the seven years of famine would be hopelessly seven years of famine that will destroy Egypt. So, it is better to say nothing ….
But where others saw a big problem, Yosef, with his Jewish vision, saw a great opportunity. If during the seven years of wealth Egypt stores grain abundantly, Egypt not only will survive the famine, Egypt (and Pharaoh) could end up becoming the richest country in the region, since everyone else will come to Egypt to buy grain.
The difference between Yosef and Pharaoh’s soothsayers had to do with a fatalistic vs. a creative vision of the future.
I think Yosef’s approach to the future characterized (and characterizes) deeply the Jewish view of the future, even in the professional or a commercial field. We Jews do not have a static or fatalistic vision of the future. As my grandfather, z”l, who came from Syria to Buenos Aires without a penny in his pocket, said. “If today I work mopping floors, it does not mean that I will have to do this for the rest of my life”. He saw the possibilities of the future as wide open.
This is also the message conveyed by Tefila, prayer: If the future is already determined, why would I pray to Hashem and ask Him to cure a loved one who is dying? We pray because we do not believe in fate or destiny. We pray because we know

that the future is God’s hand. It depends on His Will.
The future is not limited by a destiny. And Yosef understood this very well.

Yosef, his secrets for success. # 3. PROACTIVITY

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Yesterday we explained that one of the keys of Yosef’s success was his self-esteem. Yosef, despite having lived very traumatic experiences, always maintained a healthy dose of self-worth, which at the end helped Yosef to appear before Pharaoh and change his life. Self-esteem should not be confused with vanity and arrogance. In fact, as we shall see later on, Yosef was extremely humble. When he interpreted Pharaoh’s dream, Yosef could have attributed it to his own wisdom, his superpowers, etc. However, Yosef repeated again and again that it was HaShem who reveled the interpretation, not him.
There is another very important element that helped Yosef to succeed: his proactivity.
When Pharaoh tells Joseph his dream, Yosef immediately explains that cows represent Egypt and wheat represent food. Pharaoh’s dream announces that seven years of plenty will be followed by seven years of famine.
Now, once Yosef explained the dreams to Pharaoh, his mission was over. Yosef was called solely fro that. However, after Yosef explained to Pharaoh his dream, he went on, almost without pausing to breath, and out of his own initiative he presented Pharaoh with an ambitious action plan to save Egypt’s economy (Gen. 41:33-35) *“And now Pharaoh should find an intelligent and experienced man, and put him in charge of Egypt. And Pharaoh should assign officials to take 20% of the crops of the years of plenty. And gather a grain*

supply for the years of hungry."

Yosef was proactive.

There are two kinds of people: reactive and proactive individuals. Reactive people do nothing until something happens. They act by reaction. And when nothing happens, they stand still, passive waiting for something to happen. If Yosef had been reactive, after finishing the interpretation of Pharaoh's dreams he should have gone. Most probably, he would have been taken back to the dungeon. But Yosef did not *wait* for an opportunity. Yosef created it. Being proactive means to actively take control of a situation and decide what to do, anticipating events. A reactive person is a "victim" of what happens to him and her. While a proactive person feels he is empower to change what happens, to make things happen.

Yosef did not wait for Pharaoh to ask him, "And in your opinion, young man, what should we do about this prophetic dream?" . Yosef knew that if he did not bring his proposal, Pharaoh would not have asked for his opinion. Yosef created the opportunity. And he was right.

Sometimes business is tough, for example, because customers do not come to buy. "Reactive" businessmen would continue waiting for customers, and would be ready to declare bankruptcy because no one comes to buy. "Proactive" businessmen, on the other hand, when there are no customers they would go and look for them. And if they do not find customers, as the book "Who Moved My Cheese" explains, they might change their line of business. Proactive people will never be passively waiting for opportunities to arise. The would be looking for opportunities. Or try to create them. Proactive people would develop new ideas and try new things. They are never idle. This applies to virtually all areas, our professional life, our family relationships, and even in the area of Shiddukhim (finding a spouse).

Also in spiritual matters it is expected of us to be proactive. For example, regarding Teshuba, when we seek to restore our relationship with God, we cannot be passive. Our Hakhamim told us that HaShem expects us to take the initiative. We should take a first step, even a small step. "If you open up for Me a small little door, even as small as the eye of a needle, I'll open a huge gate for You."

Do not wait for the gates of glory and success to be opened

for you. Go and open every good door you can. Even if, at the beginning, these doors look insignificant. That is a Jewish definition of proactivity

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YOSEF, and the secrets of his success. # 2. SELF -ESTEEM

2. **SELF ESTEEM**
Yesterday we mentioned that by studying in depth the story of Yosef we can easily identify what were the characteristics that allowed Yosef to succeed, despite the challenging circumstances he lived. Yosef reached the top, coming from the lowest level. He was a former slave, sentenced to life imprisonment for a sexual offense he did not commit. And yet, he reached the highest peak: to be the second most important person in the mighty Egypt.

How did Yosef succeed?

We mentioned that Yosef had to cultivate his patience. And take the time to discover that many “bad” things that happen or “good” things that do not happen to us, may eventually result for our own good.

Another reason for Yosef’s success was Yosef’s self-esteem.

Yesterday we said that one of Pharaoh’s stewards returned to the court. He did not want to remember Yosef. Rather, he erased Yosef from his memory. Until one day Pharaoh had a mysterious dream that left him confused. The Egyptian monarch sought a solution, but no one among his soothsayers and

counselors was able (or willing) to decipher Pharaoh's dream. Now the steward did remember Yosef! And he told Pharaoh about the young Hebrew that had successfully interpreted his dream. Pharaoh sends for Yosef and brings him to his court. In the next scene, Yosef stands before Pharaoh, as equals. He listens to the dream of the monarch. And unhesitatingly interprets it. Next, on his own, he offers Pharaoh an action plan to save the economy of Egypt in the coming years.

Fascinating!

Just a few hours ago Yosef was in prison, probably cleaning the floors and bathrooms of the dungeon. Before that, Yosef was sold from one master to another. He was enslaved for many years. Forced to perform any job asked of him. For years Yosef was abused and humiliated… Most individuals, in less challenging situations would probably feel demoralized. With no pride, dignity and, not to mention, self-esteem. I know people who lived humiliating situations which affected their self-esteem tremendously. I have a friend who was out of work for several months. And I remember how much it took for him to find another job. Why? Because every time he went to a job interview he looked defeated, humiliated, and without a minimum dose of self esteem. And nobody wants to hire such a person … My friend had fallen into a self-destructive vicious circle. Those months without work had a very negative impact on his character, and that new "character" prevented him from progressing and moving forward.

What did Yosef do to maintain his self-esteem in the extreme circumstances he lived? What was his secret?

For Yosef, and for a Jew in general, self-esteem does not depend on "success" but on the effort involved. As Rabbi Noah Weinberg says, a Yehudi knows (or should know) that our personal responsibility is to do our best to achieve our goals. But the end results, if we did or did not achieve our goals, does not depend on us. It depends on God's will. It is

this EMUNA, knowing that there is Someone above me and above my endeavors, that determines the ultimate success of what I undertake, what sustains my self-esteem, regardless of the success I have or have not achieved. In the case of Yosef, ironically, his success did not facilitate his self-esteem. Rather, his self-esteem facilitated his success.

There are two elements that can destroy our self-esteem. First, when we think as they think in a materialistic and success-oriented society: that my own value depends on the success I have achieved, regardless of the quality of the effort I invested in the process. Only if and when I achieve my ambitious goals, I can feel good about myself. In this scenario, of course, 99% of people would suffer from very low self-esteem.

Secondly, what can destroy my self-esteem is when I know that I did not do enough. I was lazy. I did not act with integrity, etc. This feeling creates a "real" problem (which should be solved by changing course): real "guilt". And there is probably nothing that destroys our self-esteem as much guilt ….

But when I know that I did my best to achieve my goals and I know that I acted with integrity, I should feel very good about myself, regardless of the final results. For years, Yosef was able to maintain his self-esteem because he judged his own value for the effort he invested in everything he did. He knew that he had acted with integrity and honesty. He was a hard worker. He did everything in his power to succeed. And although he was a slave or a prisoner, that knowledge, that feeling about his own efforts, helped him to maintain his self-esteem at a high level. Yosef knew that success is never guaranteed. It is a divine prerogative. ’ ,□□□□ □□□ □□□ □□□ □□□□ □□□□□. The end results, Yosef knows, ultimately, depends on HaShem's will.