

אֲשֶׁר־י: (40:5) תהילים in פסוק, פרשת מקץ on מדרש רבה quotes the פרשה on the בית הלוי The אֲשֶׁר־יָלֵא פָנָה אֶל רְהָבִים; זֶה יוֹסֵף, Hashem, in בטחון his puts הגִּבֹּר אֲשֶׁר שָׁם ה' מְבַטְחוֹ - and he did not turn to magicians or magic or other sources. The מדרש explains that because יוסף asked the שר the שר to "remember me and mention me," an additional two years were added to his time in prison.

This is a famous מדרש, also cited in רש"י. The בית הלוי notes that this מדרש seems difficult to understand. On the one hand, יוסף is praised for his בטחון in Hashem. On the other hand, he is criticized and punished for making a minimal effort - two simple statements to the שר המשקים. A person is allowed to make השתדלות, as the פסוק says (דברים 15:18): הָשִׁיבָה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ כָּל אֲשֶׁר תַּעֲשֶׂה: Hashem give us a ברכה in all of our actions, and it also says (דברים 11:14): וְאַסְפֹּת דָּגָנְךָ וְתִירְשֶׁךָ: - you will gather your grain and wine. This implies that people must work - plant, nurture the fields, harvest - rather than sit back and passively rely on Hashem. So why is יוסף criticized for his השתדלות?

The בית הלוי offers a profound explanation. He explains that the תורה allows השתדלות because most people are not on the level to rely entirely on Hashem. However, there is an ultimate מדרגה of בטחון where a person places complete trust in Hashem, relying entirely on Him to provide everything. This was the level experienced in בני ישראל when they were sustained by the מן without planting or harvesting.

For most people, השתדלות is allowed as part of the process of working toward greater בטחון. Every person has a different מדרגה, and their level of effort depends on where they stand. Someone on a lower מדרגה may require more השתדלות to maintain and grow their trust in Hashem. However, once someone reaches a very high מדרגה of בטחון, even minimal השתדלות can be considered excessive.

This, explains the בית הלוי, was יוסף's situation. יוסף הצדיק is described as אֲשֶׁר שָׁם מְבַטְחוֹ, someone on an extraordinary level of בטחון. Since יוסף was on such an elevated מדרגה, even his minimal השתדלות - two short statements to the שר המשקים - was considered too much. To us, this level of sensitivity seems unfathomable; most people in his situation would naturally call for help. But יוסף, due to his unique level of בטחון, was held to a higher standard. Therefore, he was punished with two additional years in prison.

So we should understand the greatness of יוסף הצדיק and his מדרגה of בטחון, and we should also work on our own בטחון to get to such a level, הלוואי, we should come even close to that. Rabbi Oelbaum recently suggested a practical approach: make it a habit to say bezras Hashem throughout the day. For example: "I'm going to work today, bezras Hashem." "I'm getting into the car to go somewhere, bezras Hashem." "I'm traveling to the mountains for Shabbos, bezras Hashem." This small but consistent practice is a beautiful way to strengthen our בטחון.

