



Around the Shabbat Table

**Miketz / Chanukah 5763
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Shalom!

Introduction

The story of Joseph's rise to power in Egypt begins in the *parasha* of Miketz and concludes with a resolution with his family. The story of Joseph, immortalized in the Broadway show "Joseph and His Technicolor Dreamcoat", focuses our attention on a theme that has been established in the portion Vayeshev. Problems such as jealousy, hostility, and envy arose in the relationship between Joseph and his brothers. These problems escalated to a severing of family relationships, which created a sadness that lasted for over twenty years. I would like to remind you of what happened in Vayeshev: Joseph was sold as a slave in Egypt and later sent to prison, after being accused by Potiphar's wife of making sexual advances towards her.

While Joseph was in prison, the Pharaoh had two dreams, which his advisors could not interpret. The Pharaoh's cupbearer remembered that Joseph had interpreted dreams while he was in jail with him. The Pharaoh called for Joseph to be brought out of jail to interpret his dreams. He does so successfully. The Pharaoh was so impressed with Joseph's ability to listen, interpret, and set a course of action, that he appointed Joseph to a high position in government.

What were these disturbing dreams?

The first was that he was standing by the Nile River when out came seven large cows followed by seven thin cows that ate up the seven fat cows. The second dream was of seven ears of corn growing on a sturdy stalk and of seven scorched ears that swallowed up the sturdy ones.

Joseph listened to the dreams and concluded it was really the same dream both times. The seven referred to seven fruitful years of plenty, which would be followed by seven years of famine. Joseph then suggested the appointment of an administrator, "A man of wisdom," to manage Egypt's resources wisely. The Pharaoh, recognizing Joseph's ability, appointed him to the post. Joseph was given the signet ring of authority. He was also given a wife, house, and gold chains. Joseph took the task seriously and organized the building of storage cities, which are also mentioned in the Haggadah -- like Pithom and Ramses. After the seven years of plenty, the famine set in. Egypt was prepared and was able to ration food under Joseph's watchful eye. The famine hit the land of Canaan

also, where Jacob and his sons lived. Jacob instructed his sons to go to Egypt to purchase food.

When they arrived, Joseph recognized his brothers as they bowed before him. At that point, he accused them of spying in Egypt. They reveal to him that they are ten brothers out of twelve. They inform him that “one is no more” and the other younger brother is at home with their elderly father. Joseph sends them to jail. When he overhears them talking, while feigning ignorance of their foreign tongue, he hears them discussing their plight and that they are being punished for their past evil deeds. Reuben reminds them that they are now being held accountable for what they did to Joseph so many years before. Joseph toys with them. He takes Simeon captive yet fills their bags with food and their money. He instructs them to go home and return with Benjamin.

They returned home and approached Jacob telling of their experiences. They asked Jacob to send Benjamin to Egypt. Jacob refused and told them one son is already dead and he is not willing to let Benjamin go. Time passed and the famine got worse. Judah approached his father and convinced him that he would look after Benjamin’s best interest if Benjamin was sent to Egypt. Jacob finally agreed. He sends them with gifts and money. Joseph welcomed them and prepared a meal for them at his home. He returned Simeon. He inquired about Jacob’s health, but still did not reveal himself to his brothers.

During the meal he instructed his stewards to fill the brother’s bags with food and once again returned their money. He instructed the steward to place his goblet in Benjamin’s sack, thereby laying a trap to keep Benjamin. The brothers left, but were stopped and searched. When the goblet is found they are brought back to Joseph’s house. They plead their case but Joseph insisted on keeping Benjamin a hostage and sent the brothers’ home to their father. The three-part story concludes in next week’s *parasha*, Vayigash.

Several themes emerge as we study this portion. The elements of human frailty are the fodder of the trilogy, which takes place over the three *parshiyot*. The first theme is that of the jealousies that occurs in families. The second is the understanding of dreams and knowing how to apply that knowledge. The third is dealing with feelings of guilt on one hand and the choice of having revenge or giving *rachmanut* (mercy). The fourth theme is facing the reality of possible death of one or more and the survival of all.

Joseph was faced with many opportunities in his life. He was sold as a slave but emerged as a ruler. He meets his brothers twenty years later and had to decide to take revenge or follow his own destiny for the survival of the Jewish people. Conversely, Jacob was faced with possible loss of his beloved Benjamin and the continuity of Jewish life.



Questions for Your Family's Discussion

As your family shares a meal this Friday night, you might want to discuss the following questions:

1. What does the saying “he or she is a dreamer” mean to you? Have you ever thought that what a person is telling you is some form of imagination?
2. Have you ever thought about people who predict things that later come true? For example, Walt Disney talked about futuristic parks and they came to fruition.
3. Clearly Jacob takes certain risks in order to keep his family alive during famine. What risks might you take in order to prevent your children from starving?
4. Given Joseph’s choices, would you have opted for revenge or felt *rachmanut* for the brother who wronged you? Do you feel that Joseph's approach was right or wrong?

A Text to Wrestle With

Genesis 41:15

Pharaoh says to Joseph “ I have heard of you that you listen to a dream in such a manner that you solve its meaning from its contents”.

There is an interesting way to study this statement. The Hebrew word for hearing comes from the root *sh'ma*, which means to hear and also to comprehend. Joseph successfully separated himself from the court magicians and members of the king’s entourage who tried to decipher the meaning of the dreams. They tried but were unsuccessful. Joseph listened with a capital “L”.



Towards an Action Agenda

Joseph's rise to power is one of many stories over the centuries of Jews coming to power in the country in which they resided. Likewise, the story of Chanukah itself is a celebration of Jewish government. Unfortunately, many people possessing anti-Semitic attitudes have created a myth that Jews somehow hold extraordinary political and economic power. You can learn more about this type of anti-Semitism (and, in particular how Henry Ford promoted this myth by publishing a book called *The International Jew*, at

<http://www.us-israel.org/jsource/anti-semitism/ford.html>

To learn about ways you can fight such anti-Semitism and racial hatred, check out:

<http://www.adl.org/prejudice/closethebook.pdf>

As we near the end of Chanukah, it is important to recognize that significant numbers of Jews are members of interfaith families. The issue of how to address conflicting faith traditions within the family is a challenging (and controversial) one. To read about one approach to how families might address the December holidays, go to:

http://interfaithfamily.com/article/issue2/facing_december.phtml

Shabbat Shalom!

Please join together in learning with other families by sharing your family's discussions and ideas by posting them on our web site. Simply respond with your thoughts and ideas to RavADS@bjeny.org

If there is any way we can be of service, please contact Rabbi Arnold D. Samlan at the BJE Nassau Queens Center, 516-876-6535, or see our web site: <http://www.bjeny.org/>

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