



## **Around the Shabbat Table**

### **Parashat Miketz**

**December 15, 2001**  
**6<sup>th</sup> Day of Chanukah**

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Shalom!

#### Summary

There are two parts to this week's Torah portion. In the first segment, Joseph is released from prison and becomes Pharaoh's chief minister. In the second, he is reunited with his brothers, but they do not recognize him.

The Torah reading begins with an account of Pharaoh's alarming dreams. He dreamt that seven undernourished cows emerged from the Nile River and devoured seven fat cows that were grazing there. Next he dreamt that seven slender ears of corn devoured seven hearty ears. His chief butler, whose dreams had been interpreted by Joseph in prison, recommended Joseph to the Pharaoh. Joseph was fetched and prophesied that Egypt would suffer seven years of famine following seven productive years, and he advised the Pharaoh to stock up during the seven "good" years. Impressed by Joseph's wisdom, Pharaoh appointed him second in command over all Egypt.

When the famine took hold, it extended to Canaan, where Joseph's father, Jacob, and ten brothers lived. Close to starvation, Jacob sent his sons (except for Benjamin, the youngest and the son of his beloved Rachel) to Egypt to buy provisions. Joseph recognized his brothers but they did not recognize him. He imprisoned them on a charge of being spies and said that if they brought their youngest brother to Egypt, he would release them. To themselves, the brothers reflected about having thrown Joseph in the pit (verse 21, chapter 42): "We are guilty about our brother because we watched him in his anguish as he pleaded with us and we didn't listen; that is why this is happening to us." That statement moved Joseph to tears.

The brothers brought Benjamin to Egypt, and Joseph gave all of them sacks filled with grain, but in Benjamin's sack he hid a silver goblet. As they left Egypt, Joseph's guards examined their sacks and found the "stolen" goblet. Joseph decreed that, except for Benjamin, they could all return home, to which Judah vigorously objected.

### Questions for Your Family's Discussion

As your family shares a meal this Shabbat, you might want to discuss the following issues and questions:

#### I. DREAMS

What other dreams are recounted in Genesis? What function do they serve in the Bible? What function can dreams serve in life? In *your* life?

In the previous weekly reading, Joseph dreamed that his brothers bowed down to him. How does this week's chapter relate to that dream? What did Joseph stand to gain by not disclosing his identity to his brothers from the start?

#### 2. FAMILY DYNAMICS

From Joseph's perspective, how might he expect his brothers' to feel toward him? How did his actions enable him to ascertain their true feelings? How do we know from the text that Joseph was steeling himself to act as he did? What motivation could he have had for subjecting his brothers to anxiety in the ways that he did? Why did he imprison them for three days? How might Joseph's actions toward his brothers have shaped or revealed their character?

What can we learn from the Torah's willingness to describe inappropriate behavior on the part of our forefathers, like abandoning a brother in the desert?

#### 3. BONUS QUESTION

Today is the sixth day of Chanukah, which celebrates the Maccabees' successful resistance to the hedonistic, idol-worshipping culture that surrounded the Jewish population. Is Chanukah relevant today? What can we learn from the Chanukah story?

### Some Texts to Wrestle With

To convince Jacob to let Benjamin go to Egypt with them, Reuben offers, "You may slay my two sons if I fail to bring him back to you." Jacob refuses until Judah convinces him, saying, "If I do not bring him back to you...then I will have sinned against you for all time." Why was Judah's argument more compelling than his older brother's?

When the stolen goblet was found in Benjamin's sack, the brothers tore their clothing. When is this usually done in Jewish tradition? What incident is it reminiscent of with respect to Joseph and his brothers?

### Towards an Action Agenda

- ✧ Keep a dream diary. When you wake up each morning, transcribe into a journal the dreams you remember from the night before. See whether those dreams articulate anxieties or suggest solutions or unleash creative fantasies.
- ✧ Locate your local food bank and mobilize your friends to make a donation.

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](mailto:RavADS@bjeny.org)

If there is any way we can be of service, please contact us at the BJE Nassau Queens Center, 516-876-6535, or see our web site: [www.bjeny.org](http://www.bjeny.org)

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