

Home Weekly Parsha MIKEITZ
Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

Yosef always expected his dreams to come true in this world. So did his father Yaakov. And in truth so did the brothers and that is why he discomfited them so deeply. Had they felt the dreams of Yosef to be utter nonsense they would not have reacted as strongly when he related the dreams to them. They were threatened not because the dreams were nothing but rather because they were something.

Their apparent blindness and stubbornness, at not recognizing Yosef standing before them, stemmed from their necessity to deny the validity of his dreams. When Yosef will reveal himself to his brothers they will instinctively believe him because of the stock they subconsciously placed in his dreams all along.

Practical people are afraid of dreamers not because of the dreamer's impracticality but because the dreamer may turn out to be right after all. This has been proven time and again in Jewish history. The holiday of Chanukah, that we are currently celebrating, proves the dreams of the Maccabees overcame the practicalities of the Hellenist Jews who chose to survive by becoming more Greek than Jewish.

Jews over the ages could have reasonably quit and given up the struggle to survive as Jews countless times. It was always the dreamers that persevered and they have always been proven to be right and practical.

The Torah attributes the success of Yosef to the fact that he remembered his dreams. It is one thing to remember dreams of grandeur when one is poor and imprisoned. Then the dream provides hope and resilience to somehow continue. Yosef's greatness lies in his ability to remember and believe those dreams when he has risen to power. He could easily have ignored his brothers and put all of his past behind him.

He was now a great success so why continue to pursue his dreams, which by so doing could ultimately sorely endanger his position and achievements.

But Yosef doggedly pursues the full realization of his dreams. Many times in life we are frightened of advancing because we think we might risk what we already have. Judaism preaches caution in tactics and how to achieve certain goals, both spiritual and physical. But it never advocates compromising the great Jewish dreams as outlined in our Torah and tradition.

We are bidden to be prudent about life's decisions but the goal of ascending the ladder of Yaakov is never erased from our consciousness. When seeing his brothers before him, Yosef has the choice to leave everything as it is. But he chooses to pursue his dreams to their fateful end. That has become a lesson for all later generations of Jews as well. The full realization of Yosef's dream is the catalyst for reuniting all of Israel as a nation.

Shabat shalom.

Chanuka sameach.

Rabbi Berel Wein

The Author of Our Lives

Mikketz

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

It was Joseph's first real attempt to take his fate into his own hands, and it failed. Or so it seemed.

Consider the story so far, as set out in last week's Parsha. Almost everything that happens in Joseph's life falls into two categories. The first are the things done to him. His father loves him more than his other sons. He gives him a richly embroidered cloak. His brothers are envious and feel hatred towards him. His father sends him to see how the brothers are faring, attending the flocks far away. He fails to find them and has to rely on a stranger to point him in the right direction. The brothers plot to kill him, throw him in a pit, and then sell him as a slave. He is brought to Egypt. He is acquired as a slave by Potiphar. Potiphar's wife finds him attractive, attempts to seduce him, and having failed, falsely accuses him of rape, as a result of which he is imprisoned.

This is extraordinary. Joseph is the centre of attention whenever he is, as it were, onstage, and yet he is, time and again, the done-to rather than the doer, an object of other people's actions rather than the subject of his own.

The second category is more remarkable still. Joseph does do things. He dreams. He runs Potiphar's household superbly. He organises a prison. He interprets the steward's and baker's dreams. But, in a unique sequence of descriptions, the Torah explicitly attributes his actions and their success to God.

Here is Joseph in Potiphar's house:

God was with Joseph, and He made him very successful. Soon he was working in his master's own house. His master realised that God was with [Joseph], and that God granted success to everything he did.

Gen. 39:2-3

As soon as [his master] had placed him in charge of his household and possessions, God blessed the Egyptian because of Joseph. God's blessing was in all [the Egyptian] had, both in the house and the field.

Gen. 39:5

When Joseph is in prison, we read:

God was with Joseph, and He showed him kindness, making him find favour with the warden of the dungeon. Soon the warden had placed all the prisoners in the dungeon under Joseph's charge. [Joseph] took care of everything that had to be done. The warden did not have to look after anything that was under [Joseph's] care. God was with [Joseph], and God granted him success in everything he did.

Gen. 39:21-23

And here is Joseph interpreting dreams:

"Interpretations are God's business," replied Joseph. "If you want to, tell me about [your dreams]."

Gen. 40:8

Of no other figure in Tanach is this said so clearly, consistently, and repeatedly. Joseph seems decisive, organised, and successful, and so he appeared to others. But, says the Torah, it was not him but God who was responsible both for what he did and for its success. Even when he resists the advances of Potiphar's wife, he makes it explicit that it is God who makes what she wants morally impossible:

"How could I do such a great wrong? It would be a sin before God!"

Gen. 39:9

The only act clearly attributed to him occurs at the very start of the story, when he brings a "bad report" about his brothers, the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah the handmaids.[1] This apart, every twist and turn of his constantly changing fate is the result of someone else's act, either that of another human or of God.[2]

That is why we sit up and take notice when, at the end of the previous Parsha, Joseph takes destiny into his own hands. Having told the chief steward that in three days he would be pardoned by Pharaoh and restored to his former position, and having no doubt at all that this would happen, he asks him to plead his cause with Pharaoh and secure his freedom:

"When things go well for you, just remember that I was with you. Do me this favour and say something about me to Pharaoh. Perhaps you will be able to get me out of this place."

Gen. 40:14

What happens? "The chief steward did not remember Joseph. He forgot about him. (Gen. 40:23)" The doubling of the verb is powerful. He did not remember. He forgot. The one time Joseph tries to be the author of his own story, he fails. The failure is decisive.

Tradition added one final touch to the drama. It ended Parshat Vayeshev with those words, leaving us at the very point that his hopes are dashed. Will he rise to greatness? Will his dreams come true? The question "What happens next?" is intense, and we have to wait a week to find out.

Time passes and with the utmost improbability (Pharaoh too has dreams, and none of his magicians or wise men can interpret them – itself odd, since dream interpretation was a specialty of the ancient Egyptians), we learn the answer. "Two full years passed." Those, the words with which

our Parsha begins, are the key phrase. What Joseph sought to happen, happened. He did leave the prison. He was set free. But not until two full years had passed.

Between the attempt and the outcome, something intervened. That is the significance of the lapse of time. Joseph planned his release, and he was released, but not because he planned it. His own attempt ended in failure. The steward forgot all about him. But God did not forget about him. God, not Joseph, brought about the sequence of events – specifically Pharaoh's dreams – that led to his release.

What we want to happen, happens, but not always when we expect, or in the way we expect, or merely because we wanted it to happen. God is the co-author of the script of our life, and sometimes – as here – He reminds us of this by making us wait and taking us by surprise.

That is the paradox of the human condition as understood by Judaism. On the one hand we are free. No religion has so emphatically insisted on human freedom and responsibility. Adam and Eve were free not to sin. Cain was free not to kill Abel. We make excuses for our failures – it wasn't me; it was someone else's fault; I couldn't help it. But these are just that: excuses. It isn't so. We are free and we do bear responsibility.

Yet, as Hamlet said: "There's a divinity that shapes our ends/ Rough-hew them how we will." God is intimately involved in our life. Looking back in middle or old age, we can often discern, dimly through the mist of the past, that a story was taking shape, a destiny slowly emerging, guided in part by events beyond our control. We could not have foreseen that this accident, that illness, this failure, that seemingly chance encounter, years ago, would have led us in this direction. Yet now in retrospect it can seem as if we were a chess piece moved by an invisible hand that knew exactly where it wanted us to be.

It was this view, according to Josephus, that distinguished the Pharisees (the architects of what we call rabbinic Judaism) from the Sadducees and the Essenes. The Sadducees denied fate. They said God does not intervene in our lives. The Essenes attributed all to fate. They believed that everything we do has been predestined by God. The Pharisees believed in both fate and freewill. "It was God's good pleasure that there should be a fusion [of Divine providence and human choice] and that the will of man with his virtue and vice should be admitted to the council-chamber of fate" (Antiquities, xviii, 1, 3).

Nowhere is this clearer than in the life of Joseph as told in Bereishit, and nowhere more so than in the sequence of events told at the end of last week's Parsha and the beginning of this. Without Joseph's acts – his interpretation of the steward's dream and his plea for freedom – he would not have left prison. But without Divine intervention in the form of Pharaoh's dreams, it would also not have happened.

This is the paradoxical interplay of fate and freewill. As Rabbi Akiva said: "All is foreseen yet freedom of choice is given" (Avot 3:15). Isaac Bashevis Singer put it wittily: "We have to believe in freewill: we have no choice." We and God are co-authors of the human story. Without our efforts we can achieve nothing. But without God's help we can achieve nothing either. Judaism found a simple way of resolving the paradox. For the bad we do, we take responsibility. For the good we achieve, we thank God. Joseph is our mentor. When he is forced to act harshly, he weeps. But when he tells his brothers of his success, he attributes it to God. That is how we too should live.

[1] Genesis 37:2

[2] As for Joseph's dreams – were they a Divine intimation or a product of his own imagination? – that is another story for another time.

Non-Jewish Holidays and Gregorian Calendar Dates Revivim - Rabbi Eliezer Melamed

It is forbidden for a Jew to celebrate the holidays of a foreign religion * It is not appropriate to celebrate civil holidays that were originally religious holidays * In practice, there is no prohibition as long as the celebration is held without religious reference * When the celebration of the beginning of the Gregorian year is called "Sylvester," the celebration becomes forbidden * Jews are forbidden from placing a Christmas tree in their homes, offices, or stores * It is appropriate for immigrants from the former Soviet Union who celebrate New Year (Novy God) to mark it

as a day of thanksgiving for having had the privilege of immigrating to the Land of Israel * The Jewish custom is to use the Hebrew calendar, which expresses faith in God, the Creator of the world * In necessary situations, it is permissible to use the Gregorian date

Q: Is it permissible for Jews to celebrate the holidays of other religions and nations, such as Christmas, January 1st, or Chag Hakorban (Eid al-Adha)?

A: There are three types of non-Jewish holidays:

Religious holidays, which are forbidden for Jews to celebrate, such as Christmas and Easter for Christians, and Eid al-Adha for Muslims and Druze.

Civil holidays that were originally religious holidays, which it is not appropriate to celebrate, but there is no prohibition. An example of this is January 1st.

Clear civil holidays that are permissible to celebrate, including Thanksgiving in North America, Novy God for immigrants from the former Soviet Union, and the Independence Days of various countries.

Foreign Religious Holidays Are Forbidden to Celebrate

A Jew is forbidden to celebrate the holidays of a foreign religion, even when all those celebrating are Jews, and are doing so without any religious symbols. This is prohibited due to the Torah's prohibition, "You shall not follow their laws." It is written: "Like the practices of the land of Egypt, where you lived, you shall not do; and like the practices of the land of Canaan, to which I am bringing you, you shall not do; and you shall not walk in their statutes" (Leviticus 18:3). One interpretation of this prohibition is that Jews should not imitate the customs of non-Jews that are rooted in their religion, as imitating them may lead to adopting their culture and beliefs, and abandoning the commandments of the Torah.

Celebrating the Beginning of the Gregorian Year

Civil holidays that were originally religious holidays, such as January 1st marking the start of the new Gregorian year, are not appropriate to celebrate. However, in practice, as long as the celebration is held without religious reference, there is no prohibition.

Therefore, it is permissible for educators abroad to organize a celebration for Jewish youths on January 1st, so that they can celebrate the beginning of the Gregorian year with Jewish friends, and not be tempted to celebrate with non-Jews in a forbidden manner (as also ruled by Rabbi Nachum Rabinowitz ztz"l, in M'arei HaBazak 5:46).

Additionally, when necessary, such as in the context of a business event, it is permissible to celebrate, since this date marks the end of the business year and taxes. However, when the participants are non-Jews, there are two limitations:

It is forbidden to drink alcohol, and only kosher foods may be sampled.

If it is a meal, it is even forbidden to eat kosher foods there (Peninei Halakha: Kashrut 29:12).

Celebrating Sylvester Is Forbidden

When the celebration of the beginning of the Gregorian year is called "Sylvester," as is common in some Christian countries, the celebration becomes forbidden, as it turns from a civil holiday, into a religious one. Sylvester was a pope who died on December 31st, so the celebration ties his memory with the beginning of the year. It should be noted that Sylvester worked to Christianize the Roman Empire, a process that caused much suffering for the Jewish people.

There were kosher businesses in Israel that wanted to hold a Sylvester party, but the kosher supervisors notified them that they would not be able to supervise the kashrut, and would therefore have to remove the kashrut certification from the business. The simple solution for them was to call the party "A Celebration for the Beginning of the Gregorian Year," which would remove the prohibition from the celebration.

Christmas Tree

Q: Is it permissible for Jews to put up a Christmas tree for the beginning of the Gregorian year, as many do in the United States and Europe? Is it permissible for a maintenance worker to place a Christmas tree in a building he is responsible for? And is it permissible for a store owner to sell a Christmas tree to non-Jewish customers?

A: The Christmas tree, which Christians are accustomed to placing at the beginning of the Gregorian year, is a practice of a Christian holiday. Therefore, Jews are forbidden to place a Christmas tree in their homes, offices, or stores, due to the prohibition “You shall not follow their laws.” The same applies to other distinctive holiday symbols used by various religions, such as a Santa Claus figurine.

However, since the Christmas tree and other holiday symbols are not used for worship, they are not considered idolatry. Therefore, it is permissible for a Jew to provide them to non-Jews when necessary. For example, a Jew who owns a store that is asked to sell Christmas trees for the beginning of the Gregorian year may bring them to his store and sell them to non-Jews. Similarly, a Jew responsible for the maintenance of a building owned by non-Jews, and asked to place a Christmas tree there, may do so (see Shevet Halevi 10:141; M’arei HaBazak 3:111). A Jew who owns a printing press may fulfill an order to print greeting cards for the non-Jewish holidays, as there is no element of worship in the card (Masoret Moshe 4:52).

Permissible Civil Holiday – Thanksgiving

Thanksgiving is a civil holiday that the first European settlers in North America celebrated as an expression of joy for successfully settling in the new continent. The holiday meal typically includes turkey, which was discovered by Europeans in the new world. The settlers set it around the same time as Sukkot, when they express joy and thanksgiving for the year’s harvest.

Since it is a civil holiday, there is no prohibition in celebrating it. However, Rabbi Yitzhak Hutner wrote that since it is celebrated according to the Christian calendar, it is forbidden to celebrate it due to ‘avizrayhu’ (lit., ‘its accessories’, – prohibitions associated indirectly with idolatry). However, most rabbis wrote that there is no prohibition, including Rabbi Soloveitchik (Nefesh HaRav, p. 204), and Rabbi Feinstein (Igrot Moshe, Yoreh Deah 4:12). (Also in Mishneh Halachot 10:116; B’nei Banim 3:37; see also Torat Menachem, Sichot 1987, vol. 2, p. 54).

Novy God

Novy God is a civil holiday that was instituted during the communist rule in the Soviet Union as a substitute for the Christian holidays marking the beginning of the Gregorian year. Therefore, its status is similar to Thanksgiving, a holiday that does not have roots in a foreign religion. The translation of “Novy God” is “New Year.”

Indeed, it is forbidden to engage in practices that remind one of the laws of non-Jews, such as setting up a Christmas tree. However, if a different potted plant is placed instead of a Christmas tree, there is no prohibition. It is appropriate for immigrants from the former Soviet Union who celebrate Novy God to assign it meaningful value, marking it as a day of thanksgiving for having had the privilege of immigrating to the Land of Israel, and contributing to the building of the nation.

Gregorian Calendar

Q: Is it permissible to use the Gregorian calendar date?

A: The Jewish custom is to use the Hebrew calendar, which expresses faith in God, the Creator of the world, and its months are those by which the holidays are determined. In modern times, as trade and scientific connections between cities and countries became numerous and complicated, there was an increasing need to use an agreed-upon date in letters, bills, and newspapers. Since Christian countries were the leaders, the date they used became the global standard. As a result, Jews who came into contact with non-Jews began using it as their main date, and most rabbis in Western Europe and the United States agreed that there was no prohibition.

Opponents of the Gregorian Calendar Date

On the other hand, some of the Gedolei Yisrael (imminent rabbis) strongly opposed using the Gregorian date, claiming that those who used it were being dragged after foreign culture and using an idolatrous date, since its origin is tied to the birth of oto ha’ish (Jesus) whom Christians made an idol. As the Chatam Sofer wrote: “Not like those who recently began counting... the birth of the Christian messiah, writing and signing that they have no part in the God of Israel, woe to them for they have repaid their souls with evil” (Drashot Chatam Sofer, vol. 2, p. 221). His

student, Rabbi Maharam Shik (Yoreh Deah 141), even wrote that this is a Torah prohibition, as it is written: “And you shall not mention the names of other gods” (Exodus 23:13), and our Sages learned from this (Sanhedrin 63b) that a person should not say to his friend “wait for me next to such and such an object of idol worship,” and similarly, according to him, it is forbidden to mention the date marking the birth of the man whom Christians made an idol.

However, even the Chatam Sofer himself used the Gregorian date “November 8, 1821” in a letter to the government (cited in Sefer Igrot Sofrim, p. 105). Therefore, he did not think there was an absolute prohibition, and he used it out of necessity. It seems his argument was that those using the Gregorian date do so unnecessarily, with the intent to resemble the non-Jews. Other rabbis who prohibited its use also did not consider it a strict prohibition, but rather, that one should make every effort to avoid using it (Responsa Hillel Posek, Yoreh Deah 65; Yafeh LeLev Vol.5, Yoreh Deah 178:3). Similarly, this was the view of the Chief Rabbi of Israel, the Rishon L’Tzion, Rabbi Yitzhak Nissim (Responsa Yayin HaTov, Orach Chaim 8), and our teacher and mentor, Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda HaKohen Kook (L’Netivot Yisrael, vol. 2, p. 99).

The Opinion of the Majority of Authorities to Permit

However, even two generations ago, when the use of the Gregorian date was not as widespread as it is today, the majority of poskim (halakha authorities) ruled that lechatchila (optimally), it is preferable to use the Hebrew date rather than the Gregorian date, but in necessary situations, it is permitted to use the Gregorian date, as it is used in a secular context, just like the use of the names of the months and days of the week, most of which are named after idols. Some poskim added that, according to historians, this date is not the date of the birth of oto ha’ish, as he was actually born four to seven years earlier than the beginning of their counting of years (As’eh Lecha Rav 5:55; Yabia Omer, vol. 3, Yoreh Deah 9).

Practical Halacha

As a result of the development of transportation and communication, all countries became interconnected in countless ways, and the need for a universally agreed-upon international date for trade, contracts, email, communication, news, and history increased. The use of the Gregorian date thus became constant, and its religious context faded. Therefore, it is permissible to use it without restriction, though it is important to also write the Hebrew date.

We have also found that in recent generations, rabbis who interacted with the general public have regularly included both the Hebrew and Gregorian dates in their letters, as did Rabbi Goren ztz”l. Similarly, Rabbi Shalom Meshash wrote: “There is absolutely no prohibition to use the Gregorian date, and there is no concern about it” (Responsa Shemesh U’Magen, vol. 3, Orach Chaim 60:3). Likewise, the Lubavitcher Rebbe wrote: “In all our countries, it is simple practice to use it when there is some need or reason” (Shulchan Menachem, vol. 4, §16).

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The State of the Jewish Nation: Navigating Paradox

Why Was Pharaoh Blown Away by Joseph?

RABBI YY JACOBSON

It is a riveting story. Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, has two dreams, we learn in this week’s Torah portion, Miketz.

In the first, Pharaoh sees himself standing over the Nile River, “And, behold, there came up out of the River seven cows, handsome and fat of flesh, and they fed in the reed grass. And, behold, seven other cows came up after them out of the River, ugly and lean of flesh, and stood by the other cows upon the bank of the River. And the ugly and lean cows ate up the seven handsome and fat cows.” [1]

In the second dream, Pharaoh sees seven thin, shriveled ears of grain swallow seven fat ears of grain. None of the wise men of Egypt can offer Pharaoh a satisfactory interpretation of his dreams.

Then, the “young Hebrew slave,”[2] Joseph, is summoned from his dungeon to the palace. Joseph interprets the dreams to mean that seven years of plenty, symbolized by the fat cows and fat grain, will be

followed by seven years of hunger, reflected by the lean cows and the shriveled ears. The seven years of famine will be so powerful that they will "swallow up" and obliterate any trace of the years of plenty.

Joseph then advises Pharaoh how to deal with the forthcoming crisis[3]: "Now Pharaoh must seek out a man with insight and wisdom and place him in charge of Egypt. A rationing system will have to be set up over Egypt during the seven years of surplus," Joseph explains, "in which grain will be stored for the upcoming years of famine."

Pharaoh is blown away by Joseph's vision. "Can there be another person who has G-d's spirit in him as this man does?" Pharaoh asks his advisors. "There is none as understanding and wise as you," he says to Joseph. "You shall be over my house, and according to your word shall all my people be ruled; only by the throne will I outrank you." Joseph is appointed Prime Minister of Egypt, the most powerful man in the ancient superpower, besides the king.

Four Questions

Torah commentators struggle with four questions concerning this story.[4]

A) Following his interpretation of the dreams, Joseph proceeded to give Pharaoh advice on how to deal with the impending famine. How is a freshly liberated slave not scared of offering the King of Egypt, the monarch who ruled a superpower, unsolicited advice? Pharaoh summoned Joseph to interpret his dreams, not to become an advisor to the king! Such chutzpah could have cost him his life.

B) Pharaoh was thunderstruck by Joseph's solution to the problem. But one need not be a rocket scientist to suggest that if you have seven years of plenty followed by seven years of famine, you should store food during the time of plenty for the time of hunger. What was the genius in Joseph's advice?

C) Pharaoh also was amazed by Joseph's interpretation of the dreams themselves, which none of his own wise men could conceive. But Joseph's interpretation seems simple and obvious: When are cows fat? When there is lots of food. When are they lean? When there's no food. When is grain fat? When there is a plentiful harvest. When is grain lean? During a time of famine. So why was Pharaoh astonished by Joseph's rendition of his dreams? And why could no one else conceive of the same interpretation?

D) How did Pharaoh confer upon Joseph the highest position in the land not even knowing if his interpretation will materialize? Why did the Egyptian king immediately appoint Joseph as viceroy without any evidence that this young slave was the right man for the job?

Uniting the Cows

On Shabbos Parshas Miketz, 27 Kislev, 5734, December 22, 1973, the Lubavitcher Rebbe presented the following explanation.[5]

The dream experts of Egypt did conceive of Joseph's interpretation to Pharaoh's dreams, that seven years of hunger would follow seven years of plenty. Yet they dismissed this interpretation because it did not account for one important detail of the dream.

In Pharaoh's first dream, he saw how the seven ugly and lean cows that came up after the seven handsome cows "stood near the other (fat) cows upon the bank of the River." [6] There was a moment during which both sets of cows coexisted simultaneously, and only afterward did the lean cows proceed to swallow the fat cows.

It was this detail of the dream that caused the wise men of Egypt to reject the interpretation that Joseph would later offer to Pharaoh and compelled them to present all types of farfetched explanations.[7]

Because how is it possible that plenty and famine should coexist? Either you have fat cows alone or you have lean cows alone, but you can't have them both together! Either you are satiated, or you are starving, but you can't be satiated while you are starving, and you can't be starving while you're satiated! The seven years of famine simply cannot be present during the seven years of surplus. Either you have lots of food, or you have no food, but you can't have both at the same time. You can't be wealthy and poor at once.

This is where Joseph's brilliance was displayed. When Joseph proceeded to tell Pharaoh how to prepare for the coming famine, he was not

offering him advice on how to run his country; rather, the advice was part of the interpretation of the dream.

Joseph understood that the coexistence of the two sets of cows in the dream contained the solution to the approaching famine: During the years of plenty Egypt must "live" with the consciousness and awareness of the pending years of famine as though they were already present. Even while enjoying the abundance of the years of plenty, Egypt must experience in its imagination the reality of the upcoming famine, and each and every day store away food. The seven lean cows ought to be very much present and alive, in people's minds and in their behaviors, during the era of the seven fat cows. Conversely, if this system was implemented, then even during the years of famine, the nation would continue enjoying the abundance of the years of plenty. The seven fat cows would be present and alive even during the era of the seven lean cows, because of all the food they saved up.

This is what impressed Pharaoh so deeply about Joseph's interpretation. To begin with, Pharaoh was struck by Joseph's ingenious accounting for that one detail of the dream that had evaded all the wise men of Egypt.

But what thrilled him even more was Joseph's demonstration that Pharaoh's dreams not only contained a prediction of future events, but also offered a solution, a remedy, on how to deal with those events. The dreams did not only portend problems, but also offered solutions.[8] Many people can tell you all about the pending problems; Joseph's brilliance was that within the very dream which predicted the crisis he perceived the solution. In the very dream predicting calamity, he saw the way out of disaster,

Paradox

The stories of the Torah describe not only physical events that took place at a certain point in history, but also timeless tales occurring continuously within the human heart.

All of us experience cycles of plenty and of famine in our lives. There are times when we have moral, emotional and spiritual clarity, and our consciousness is filled with love and connection; our souls are on fire with authenticity and truth. At other times, we are hungry: for integration, for clarity, for bliss. We are feeling anxiety and stress because we are not experiencing our connection with our souls and the soul of the universe.

This was Joseph's power. He taught us how to integrate the two paradoxical states of consciousness. And this always happens in dreams: When we are awake, our brain shuns paradox. When we dream, or enter altering states of consciousness, paradoxes converge and dance together. Joseph is the master of explaining dreams—he knew how to help people remove the fear of paradox and integrate it into their regular state of consciousness.

And when we do that, we can discover that all the parts of ourselves are welcome; each of them contains the still inner voice of oneness and love. Each of them helps us bring light and truth into the spaces we need to work through.

We, the Jewish people, are living today with so much paradox (I can talk about myself, but I think it's true for many of us). We feel so much pain, but also so much love. We feel abandoned, but also profound resolve and resilience. We are dreamers. The two experiences coexist not only because of weakness and inconsistencies; but as Joseph, the master of dreams, has taught us—these paradoxes summon us into a much deeper space of consciousness, where infinite light can illuminate profound darkness.

May we embrace each other with endless love, clarity, and resolve to become the people we need to become, to shine the light we are called upon to shine, to confront the nasty but meaningless powers of fakeness, stupidity, cruelty, and hate. Reality will prevail because it is real.

[1] Genesis 41: 1-4. [2] Ibid. 41:12. [3] Ibid. 41:33-40. [4] See Ramban, Bechayah, Akeidah, Abarbenel, Ralbag, Alshich, Kli Yakar, Or Hachayim and Maharik—in their commentaries on the story. [5] Published in Likkutei Sichos vol. 15, pp. 339-347. The Rebbe's explanation follows Rashi's interpretation of the story. See however Ramban to Genesis 41:4, Ralbag and Or Hachaim ibid. 41:33 for an alternative perspective, which would be invalid according to Rashi

(Likkutei Sichos ibid. footnote #9). [6] Genesis 41:3. [7] See Rashi ibid. 41:8, from Midrash Rabah Genesis 89:6. [8] There is a problem here. The detail of the cows coexisting at the river was not repeated by Pharaoh when sharing his dreams with Joseph. See Likkutei Sichos ibid. for an explanation. One possible approach is based on what the Ramban says here, that it is obvious that Pharaoh repeated all the details to Yosef and the Torah does not have to say it, because it is obvious. The Kli Yakar (41,3) says clearly that it was this coexistence which led Yosef to his interpretation, so although the Torah doesn't explicitly mention it in Pharaoh's version of the dreams, Yosef certainly heard it (or sensed it) from him. But maybe there is something deeper: Perhaps the Torah does not mention it because Pharaoh underscored it, as he could not find meaning in it. At times, we try to ignore or suppress that which does not "make sense to us." This was part of Yosef's brilliance to pick up on it and turn it into a central theme of the dream and the solution to the crisis. We see this in our lives: What we repress often turns into the most meaningful awareness in our lives. [9] King Solomon in his profound wisdom put it simply: "A friend's love endures for all times" (Proverbs 17:7).]

**Parshat Miketz: Why Didn't Joseph Contact His Father?
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Ohr Torah Stone**

"And Joseph knew his brethren, but they knew him not. But he behaved like a stranger and spoke harshly to them. And Joseph remembered the dreams which he dreamed of, and said unto them, 'You are spies; to see the nakedness of the land you have come.'" (Genesis 42:8-9)

In the Torah portion of Miketz, the drama of Joseph and his brothers takes on new dimensions. From a situation in which Joseph is the hunted and the brothers are the hunters, we move into the very opposite. Joseph becomes the hunter and the brothers the hunted, although they don't understand why!

But we also realize that until now the text has been silent about Joseph's relationship to his past. This forces us to query how Joseph can spend twenty-two years of his life in a foreign country like Egypt without ever looking over his shoulder to find out how his family in Canaan is faring. When he sat in Egyptian prisons it was impossible to communicate, but what about the years when he ruled as the Grand Vizier of a great empire? Could he not have sent servants, carrier pigeons, messages on papyrus? Even if he had no desire ever to see his brothers again, should his aged father who loved him so much have been made to suffer for their sins?

Nahmanides tells us that Egypt is only a six-day journey from Hebron but "...even if it was a year's journey, he should have notified him" (Genesis 42:9). The longer Joseph is silent, the longer Jacob is deprived of his beloved son, the greater our question on Joseph's character.

Nahmanides explains that Joseph was prevented from contacting his father because he was driven by his dreams, and guided by their inevitable course. It was his intention to wait until all elements of his dream – the sun, moon and eleven stars, symbolic of his father, mother and eleven brothers bowing down to him – came together in Egypt, when and where the details could be fulfilled exactly. The dreams controlled Joseph. Emotions could not outweigh what he believed was destiny. Therefore, sending word home before the famine would force his entire family to go down to Egypt and would have negated the possibility of his dreams being fulfilled (Nahmanides on Genesis 42:9).

Abarbanel paints Joseph differently, saying that it was impossible for him to contact his father until he was convinced that his brothers had truly repented; otherwise the joyous news that Joseph was still alive would have also meant a father facing ten lying brothers who now would be forced to reveal their role in the murderous deception amidst all sorts of recriminations. From this perspective everything Joseph does while concealing his identity is intended to increase the brothers' awareness, reliving what they inflicted upon him. Since he was thrown into a pit, he puts them in a pit. Then he tells them to return home without Shimon whom he keeps in prison as a hostage until Benjamin will be brought to Egypt. This should make them realize that for the second time in their

lives they are returning with a brother missing – and Shimon had been the primary instigator against Joseph. And indeed they declare, "We deserve to be punished because of what we did to our brother. We saw him pleading with us, but we would not listen..." (Genesis 42:21).

It is only after Joseph treats Benjamin with favoritism, and then condemns him to imprisonment as a thief – and Judah offers himself and all the brothers in Benjamin's stead – that Joseph realizes the depth of his brothers' repentance. After all, Benjamin is also a son of Rachel, a favorite of Jacob – and this could have been a marvelous opportunity to be rid of him as they had gotten rid of Joseph. If the brothers are now willing to offer themselves as slaves so that their father will not have to suffer further grief at the loss of Benjamin, they apparently really have changed and repented for their sale of Joseph!

A third way to understand why Joseph didn't get in touch with his family is the simplest in terms of the plain meaning of the text. What happened to Joseph in Egypt was a natural result of remembrances of past resentments, a man who was almost murdered by his own brothers, whom he never suspected bore him such evil designs.

Until he had been cast into the pit, Joseph was basically an innocent child, basking in the love of his father with no comprehension as to how much his brothers hated him. He was so beloved that he took that love for granted; he naïvely and unselfconsciously believed it was shared by everyone in his family. Only someone with absolutely no guile could have advertised his supercilious dreams of mastery over his brothers to those very same brothers. But in the harsh reflection of the fact that his brothers were willing to leave him to die in a provision-less pit, the venom of their hatred was clear.

And in addition to condemning his brothers, he lays a good part of the blame upon the frail shoulders of his father, who should have realized where his unbridled favoritism would lead. The coat of beautiful colors was the first thing the brothers tore off him, eventually turning it into a blood-soaked rag. In the pit, Joseph comes to realize that the ingredients of excessive love can be transformed into a poisonous potion and that his father had totally mismanaged the family dynamic. One might even justify Joseph's uttering in the pit: I hate my father's house. I will never communicate with my father or my brothers again.

Joseph's subsequent behavior in Egypt would indicate that he really tried to escape his father's house, severing all ties to the past. The Midrash teaches that there are three reasons why the Jews didn't assimilate in Egypt: "They didn't change their names, their clothes, or their language." If the Midrash is an indication of how to protect oneself against assimilation, Joseph, who changed all three, left himself completely open. The first step begins after his success in interpreting Pharaoh's dreams. In reward, Joseph is appointed Grand Vizier, and the text is explicit about his change of garb: "[Pharaoh] had him dressed in the finest linen garments; and placed a gold chain around his neck..." (Genesis 41:42).

The second change is a new name which Pharaoh gives him, Tzofnat Paneach – from all textual indication, an Egyptian name. With this new name, he marries Asnat, the daughter of the priest of On, hardly a fitting match for Jacob's beloved son and Abraham's great-grandson.

When the first child of Tzofnat and Asnat is born, the name given to the boy, Menasheh, seems to hammer in the nail of farewell to Joseph's former life. "God has allowed me to forget my troubles and my father's house" (Genesis 41:51), the verb 'nasheh' meaning forgetting.

And although the Jewish slaves in Egypt may not have changed their language, Joseph obviously did. Amongst themselves, his brothers speak Hebrew; "...They knew not that Joseph understood them, for the interpreter was between them" (Genesis 42:23), testifies the biblical text. Given such changes, one may very well conclude that the Grand Vizier and Joseph, the son of Jacob, had drifted worlds away from each other. To be sure, in his moral life, Joseph certainly remains true to the teachings of his father and grandfather. He demonstrates almost superhuman piety in rejecting the advances of Mrs. Potiphar – being unable to display faithlessness to his generous employer and still unwilling to "sin against God" (Genesis 39:9). And indeed, he turns to God constantly, stressing that whatever he accomplishes is actually due

to the Almighty. However, the name of God the text chooses is Elokim, the universal presence of the universe, while the four-letter personal and more nationalistic (Abrahamic) name is deliberately avoided.

Joseph remains moral and may even privately have conducted himself in accordance with his childhood rituals. However, certainly from the public perspective, he willfully turned himself into a consummate Egyptian. And I would certainly maintain that he has no desire to contact the family which caused him such pain and suffering – especially his father, who must ultimately assume responsibility, albeit inadvertent, for the sibling enmity. And indeed, it would seem that Joseph had succeeded in erasing his childhood years and settling in quite well in the assimilating environment of Egypt – until his brothers' arrival to purchase food.

Their arrival brings back a flood of thoughts, memories and emotions which Joseph had desperately tried to repress. First, we see his anger. He treats his brothers with understandable hatred and punishes them by taking his revenge and casting them into a dungeon similar to the one they had cast him into. But that night he cannot sleep, his mind overactive with pining for his full brother Benjamin, who had been too young to join his half-brothers in their crime against Joseph. Joseph aches to see this pure and whole brother from his same mother – and so sends the brothers (sans Shimon) back with the mission to return with Benjamin.

Joseph's ruse with the silver goblet plan may very well have been to keep Benjamin at his side, thereby holding on to a part of the past he now realizes he has deeply missed, while rejecting the rest. But when Judah evokes the image of an old grieving father whose life will be reduced to a pathetic waste if word reaches him that Benjamin has become a slave in Egypt, Joseph, the Grand Vizier breaks down.

Perhaps as Judah speaks, Joseph poignantly remembers Shabbat moments inside his father's tent, whose simple beauty far eclipses the rowdy Egyptian debaucheries. Perhaps, he conjures the wisdom of Jewish teachings he heard as a child at his father's knee. The mature Joseph finally understands that although his father may have 'set up' the family dysfunction, it was not because he loved Joseph too little, but rather because he loved Joseph too much. And if Jacob's love had been the first step causing Joseph's alienation from the family, it was that same love which had given him the ego strength to always land on his feet and eventually return to his father's and brothers' embrace.

In effect, according to this interpretation, Joseph was our first ba'al teshuva (penitent). The Joseph stories – and the book of Genesis – conclude, "And Joseph dwelled in Egypt, he and his father's house" (Genesis 50:22) – he and his father's household, he and his father's lifestyle from their common home in the land of Canaan. He even recognizes the centrality of the land of Israel, telling them with his dying breath that God will surely remember them and take them to the land He promised their fathers, adjuring them at that time "to bring up my bones from this place [Egypt] with you" (Genesis 50:22).

From this perspective, Joseph teaches that no matter how far one wanders, one always returns in some fashion to 'beit abba', one's earliest memories and one's original traditions. This is especially true if those formative years were filled with parental love.

Shabbat Shalom

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Yosef, Planner of the Egyptian Economy

By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

Question #1: Wise

Why does Yosef mention "Understanding" before "Wise"?

Question #2: Power!

Why does the Economic Minister need to control the Army?

Question #3: Bureaucracy

Are Bureaucracies Ever Good?

Parshas Mikeitz devotes a considerable discussion to Yosef's plans to save Egypt, and indeed, to save all of mankind in their part of the Fertile Crescent. Our goal will be to see how a careful reading of the words of the Torah reading demonstrate Yosef's financial brilliance and his unbelievable care and concern for all of humanity. We will begin at the beginning of the parsha.

Pharaoh has two dreams that not one of his advisers has been able to interpret to Pharaoh's satisfaction. As a result, Yosef is hauled from the pit, brought before Pharaoh, and interprets the dreams: There will be seven years of plenty followed by seven years of famine. Reading Chapter 41, pasuk 32, "Regarding the repetition of the dream to Pharaoh, this is because the plan is already prepared as far as G-d is concerned; He will be bringing it to fruition very soon."

At this point, Yosef has done everything he was "hired" to do. He was brought out of the pit in order to interpret the dream, and he has done so. However, he now goes on to provide unsolicited advice.

Personally, I have a policy not to provide advice unless asked for it. My experience is that when you provide advice that someone has not asked for, you are doing them a disservice. Advice that is not sought is usually rejected, and the dismissal of this option or mode of operation becomes entrenched into the individual's psyche. Even if later on someone else suggests this approach or they might realize on some level that this is the best option, they may still reject it due to their emphatic initial dismissal of the advice. Thus, it is better for them if I not suggest what they should do.

Yosef does not follow this approach. I assume that Yosef trumps Kaganoff, and he has a far better idea of how to take care of matters. Bottom line, Yosef now gives Pharaoh unsolicited advice.

"Pharaoh should identify a man of deep understanding and wise." There are two different terms in Hebrew for wisdom: binah and chachmah. They are not the same thing; they are complementary. Navon, the word used in the pasuk for a man of deep understanding, has become an English word as the noun, a maven.

A chacham is one who has a wide variety of information. A mavin or a navon, on the other hand, is one who can take that information, analyze it, and use it.

Yosef emphasizes to Pharaoh that what is needed is a man who is both a navon and a chacham, placing navon first. This is quite odd, since chachmah is usually placed first. After all, in order to analyze information and make plans based on it, one first needs to acquire the information. However, here, Yosef prioritizes navon before chacham.

The reason for the inverted order is that they are faced here with an unprecedented situation. We know that this part of the world is prone to droughts and famines. Both Avraham and Yitzchak experienced them. However, this case is unusual. Yosef is telling Pharaoh: We have been told in advance that there will be a number of years of unusual plenty, and they will be followed by a number of years of famine. We need to tighten our belts during the years of plenty so that we can provide our own solution for the coming difficulty. This unusual situation requires an unusual man, one who is more navon than chacham. He needs to imagine what to do and plan for an unprecedented circumstance. Chachmah, knowledge of facts, is necessary, but less so than binah, imagination how to plan and implement a program for a world that no one has ever seen or experienced.

And Pharaoh repeats Yosef's terminology, placing navon before chacham: "There is none so discerning and wise as you."

We see many unusual qualities in this Pharaoh. He is willing to listen to unsolicited advice, which itself is a rare quality. We will soon see other unusual characteristics about this man.

"And he should be appointed over the Land of Mitzrayim." Why does this man need to be appointed over the entire land of Egypt? We can certainly understand the need to appoint a wise economic minister, but why does this man need to have power over the entire nation, including over the military which, at that point in history, was the most powerful in the world. This economic minister needs to create a plan that would enable Egypt to survive the famine. Why does Yosef insist that he have absolute authority over the entire country?

I have several suggestions for an answer, and they are not mutually exclusive.

Egypt was a regimented society. Everyone was born into a caste system, one that controlled everything in their lives including their profession, whether or not they had skill in that area. However, economic leaders, economists, chairmen of banks, secretaries of commerce and such are generally not accorded meaningful respect or esteem, especially by the military. The military generally makes the country's decisions or has a large say in the decision making.

This is my first suggestion: Yosef realized that for the man in command to have the respect he needed to make decisions, he would need to be placed above everyone else, except Pharaoh. He could not be put in a position where he would have to fight for power with the military or the like.

Another reason why the economic planner must be provided virtually total control is that some of his decisions will not be popular. This could lead to rioting in the streets, and the economic minister would need to command the military authoritatively.

The pasuk continues: "Pharaoh should appoint many middle-managers, vechimeish the land of Mitzrayim." The word "vechimeish" is a military term, to arm. Of course, when talking about a famine, we do not mean that he is providing the population with bows and spears to fight a famine. In this context, it means that the middle management must organize the bureaucracy in an expedient way on the same level that they would if they were planning a military campaign.

Once this is completed, what is done then?

"They shall gather all the food from the good years and place it into storage for the bad years."

Obviously, this cannot mean literally "all" of the food from the good years --- people need to eat during the good years also. Rather, the lion's share of the food from the good years would be placed in storage. This is not how matters are usually handled. When people have extra disposable income, they spend it. In this case, they would have eaten or disposed of the extra food.

"Gather all the good grain under Pharaoh's hand."

I would assume that, under normal circumstances, Pharaoh was not involved in the production and storage of grain in Mitzrayim. He did not need it for himself, as he certainly had a large personal store. We also know that Egypt's economy was based on the Nile's annual flooding cycle. In ancient times, Egypt was a major producer of cotton, a notoriously thirsty crop. In general, Egypt had enough flooding water to be a major producer and exporter of cotton. This would mean that they certainly had ample grain production – you don't produce cotton when you have no food.

Continues the pasuk: "Gather together all the food in the cities, and have it protected there."

It is interesting to note that Yosef utilizes the local governments -- each province or county of Egypt will be in charge of storing their own grain. They will be in charge of whatever grows in their area. In those days, there was not much shipping of foodstuff. Each city was supplied by the fields around the city. Yosef's advice the locals in each city should ensure that whatever is not necessary for immediate use is stored. Note that in the advice given here and when Yosef later follows up, there is no mention of the construction of storage houses. This should be quite surprising, as it would be odd if Egypt had a massive amount of storage houses in advance, and not having sufficient storage space would be a problem for the plan that Yosef is proposing.

Although it is not mentioned in the Torah anywhere, I would suggest that these storage silos had to be constructed, and that this is another reason why Yosef needed to be second in command to the king. He needed to be able to redirect all resources away from other construction projects, such as roads and canals, and direct them toward constructing grain storage silos. This is just a suggestion; it is not supported -- or negated -- by anything in the text.

"The food shall be kept for the land so that it will be there for the seven years of want – thereby the country will not collapse in its era of shortage."

This is now the end of Yosef's suggestion, his unsolicited advice. He has finished his interpretation of the dream, including that the events will take place soon – therefore swift action is required. He suggests his program, and Pharaoh immediately accepts it in all its details. There is no indication here that Yosef was interrupted at any point during the advice-giving session, while Pharaoh, and the rest of the advisors, all listen. The pasuk (ibid. v. 37) closes: "The plan was good in the eyes of Pharaoh and in the eyes of his servants."

Pharaoh has seen that Yosef is a man who knows how to think and who knows how to plan. However, we are all aware that the man with the great idea is often not the person best qualified to carry it out. The "ideas guy" is not necessarily the best at actualizing that idea. The reason why, nevertheless, Yosef is chosen to be in command is found in the next pasuk.

They all liked Yosef's plan. Pharaoh now says to his advisors (ibid. v. 38): "Have we found any man like him who contains the spirit of G-d?"

This is a fascinating insight on Pharaoh's part. He recognizes in Yosef something exceptional, something metaphysical, something beyond what we deal with in the regular world. This characteristic is one that Yosef has and no one else has. This characteristic turns Yosef from being simply an "ideas guy" to something much more.

Pharaoh says to Yosef (ibid. v. 39): "After G-d has told you all this, there is no navon and chacham like you in the whole land of Egypt." Note again the order of the words. We noted that the unprecedented circumstances called for a person with an unprecedented source of wisdom. Because "G-d has told you all this," no other factors need to be considered. Pharaoh sees that Yosef has an ability that he, Pharaoh, cannot measure, but certainly has the best chance to be successful in the uncharted territory that he foresees...

We will continue this topic next week. In the interim, please check our opening questions to see whether we have answered them to your satisfaction.

Rav Kook Torah

Chanukah: The Sacred Protects Itself

Rav Kook made the following comments when speaking at the inaugural ceremony for the Mizrachi Teachers Institute in Jerusalem during Chanukah, 1932:

Why is it that the Menorah we use in our homes for Chanukah must be different than the Menorah in the Temple, bearing eight or nine branches instead of seven?

People think that kodesh and chol — the realms of sacred and secular — are adversaries battling one another. But in truth, there is no conflict between kodesh and chol. Our national life requires that both of these domains be fully developed and channeled toward building the nation. We should aspire to combine them and imbue the secular with holiness.

We strive for kiddush, to sanctify the mundane and extend the influence of kodesh on chol. But we also need havdalah to differentiate between the two realms. Havdalah is necessary to prevent the blurring of the boundaries between the sacred and the secular, to preclude the debasement of kodesh and its misuse for secular purposes.

There exists a perfect kodesh, lofty and sublime. We draw from its essence, from its content, from its living treasure. And we are commanded to protect it from any secular influences that could dull the rich tapestry of the kodesh.

Thus, Jewish law forbids us to fashion a Menorah similar to the one used in the holy Temple. In this way, the kodesh defends itself from any flow of secular influences that may diminish its value. It is because of this self-protection that the kodesh is able to retain its power to strengthen and vitalize secular frameworks.

Greek thought asserted that there is no holiness in the practical world. The Greek mind could only see in the universe — from the lowest depths to the farthest stars — mundane forces. Knesset Yisrael, however, knows how to join heaven and earth. We know how to unite kodesh and chol, how to sanctify ourselves with that which is permissible, to eat a meal in holiness and purity.

We are able to attain this ideal unification because we maintain the necessary barriers, we know how to distinguish between the sacred and the secular. Eternal Israel is built on these complementary principles of *chibur* and *havdalah*, unification and distinction.

In an institution where both sacred subjects and secular disciplines are taught, we must not forget that our ancient battle against Greek culture is not over. If we are careless, the sacred will become profane.

We must remember that we are descendants of those heroes who sacrificed their lives to guard the holy. Like the Temple Menorah, Torah study is the highest level of *kodesh*. We must be careful that our study of Torah does not degenerate into a study of literature, not even a study of national literature or an ancient science. Torah is the word of the Living God. Our practical activities must be illuminated by the holy light of Torah and its *mitzvot*. As the psalmist said, “Your word is a lamp for my feet and a light for my path.” (Psalms 119:5)

Parshas Mikeitz

Rabbi Yochanan Zweig

This week’s Insights is dedicated in loving memory of Miriam bas Yoel, Mery Sterental.

Trying Too Hard

And it came to pass at the end of two full years, that Pharaoh dreamed; and, behold, he stood by the river (41:1).

This week’s parsha begins in a rather unusual manner; while the Torah is about to recount a detailed description of Pharaoh’s dreams, the first verse is really a continuation of the previous story. The two years, that set the backdrop for what is about to take place, are referring to the additional years that Yosef languished in jail after asking the wine steward to hasten his release.

At the end of last week’s parsha, Rashi explains; “Since Yosef relied on the wine steward to remember him (instead of relying solely on Hashem) he was forced to remain imprisoned for two additional years” (40:23). In other words, Yosef is punished for pleading with the wine steward to help him get released.

Many of the commentators wonder as to what exactly was Yosef’s mistake. After all, while we all believe and trust that Hashem ultimately provides our *parnassa* (livelihood), we know that we must actually go to work in order to receive what Hashem provides for us. This process is known as making *hishtadlus* – exerting an effort. In other words, we live in a physical world with its unique built-in natural laws; we therefore must make the effort within the construct of the reality that we live in, and then Hashem directs to us what He desires we receive.

In light of this, the commentators ask; what did Yosef do wrong? Yosef was merely “doing his *hishtadlus*” to improve his situation! This is a fundamental philosophical understanding of how the world operates; Yosef getting punished for this action seems difficult to understand.

The Targum Yonasan Ben Uziel and Targum Yerushalmi (40:23) make a very opaque comment: “Because Yosef abandoned the *chessed* of the One above and relied on the *chessed* of the wine steward, Yosef remained incarcerated until it was the proper time for his release as determined by Hashem.” What *chessed* are these Targumim referring to? A careful reading of the *pesukim* reveals what the Targumim saw in the story: When Yosef first gets incarcerated the Torah says (39:20), “and he was there in the prison. But Hashem was with Joseph, and showed him *chessed*, and gave him favor in the eyes of the keeper of the prison.” This “*chessed*” that Hashem shows to Yosef leads to remarkable circumstances whereby Yosef is actually put in charge of the prison and prisoners. The Torah tells us that everything that happened in the prison was under his supervision and he answered to no one (39:22-23). In fact, as the *posuk* attests – Hashem was actually with him in prison.

Yet, when he successfully interprets the dreams of the baker and wine steward and goes on to correctly predict the events that would come to pass, Yosef begs the wine steward to “think of me when it shall be well with you, and I beg you to do for me a *chessed*...” (40:14).

We can now understand what the Targumim are referring to and also learn an astonishing life lesson regarding the limitations of making *hishtadlus*. Yosef was granted an incredible gift by Hashem. How does a

lowly slave, from a foreign country, convicted of a crime against one of the high-born families of Egypt, come to such a position in jail? Obviously, and as the Torah clearly attests, Hashem was with Yosef and gifted him a miraculous situation.

Yosef’s mistake, it seems, was not recognizing that the very fact that Hashem had granted him such success under the most dire of circumstances, meant that Hashem was telling him: “This is where I want you to be.” Instead, Yosef makes an effort to engage the wine steward, and asks for the wine steward’s *chessed*. Yosef, being the great man that he was, should have recognized that exchanging the *chessed* of Hashem for the *chessed* of the wine steward was a terrible mistake.

Often, we do not internalize the incredible gifts that the Almighty has bestowed upon us. We constantly look to try and change our circumstances. While we must make every effort to improve ourselves and grow in many areas of our lives, we must be cognizant and appreciative of what we have already. Trying to change your life when Hashem has clearly blessed your current life trajectory means that you don’t really appreciate what Hashem has granted you. We must make *hishtadlus* to be worthy of Hashem’s blessings; not to reject those blessings that He already bestowed upon us.

Who Can You Trust?

And Yehuda said to his father, “Send the boy with me [...] I will guarantee his safety; from my hand you can request him; if I do not bring him back to you, and set him before you, then let me bear the blame forever” (43:8-9).

When the brothers returned from Egypt with the food they acquired, they informed their father Yaakov that before they would be allowed to return down to Egypt they would have to be accompanied by their youngest brother, Binyamin. In fact, Yosef was holding Shimon hostage until they returned. Yaakov naturally balked at this, seeing as he was losing sons at a horrifying rate.

Reuven makes an effort to persuade his father with a rather strange statement: “I will bring him (Binyamin) back safely to you or you can put my two sons to death” (42:37). The Midrash (Bereishis Rabbah 90:9) takes Reuven to task: Yaakov responded, “You deranged first born! Are not your children my children as well?” Yaakov refuses to permit Binyamin to go.

Yet a few short *pesukim* later Yehuda says to his father, “Send the boy with me [...] I will guarantee his safety; from my hand you can request him; if I do not bring him back to you, and set him before you, then let me bear the blame forever.” Rashi explains that Yehuda put up his share, in both this world and in the world to come, as collateral for the safety of Binyomin. In other words, Yehuda would be lost for all eternity if he doesn’t bring Binyomin back.

Strangely, Yaakov finds this acceptable and agrees to send Binyomin down with Yehuda. In light of the aforementioned midrash, why is Yaakov okay with Yehuda’s proposed consequences for failure to return Binyomin? In essence, he would be losing a son for all eternity! On the face of it, both Reuven and Yehuda are proposing terrible consequences for their failure to perform. Why does Yaakov accept Yehuda’s proposal?

This story teaches us a remarkable lesson in human behavior. Often, we try to guarantee good behavior by creating deterrents to bad behavior. This almost never works because, come what may, we always rationalize why the punishments won’t occur, or otherwise won’t apply to our situation. The classic example: harsh punishment doesn’t successfully deter crime.

Yehuda makes a very different argument than Reuven: “I will guarantee his safety.” He personally guarantees performance. In other words, he is undertaking as a personal commitment that he will fulfill his word. Of course, giving dire consequences also underscores the level of commitment, but the real guarantee of performance isn’t fear of the punishment for nonperformance, it’s the acceptance of a personal obligation. This is what convinces Yaakov.

Fear of painful consequences rarely works to help one achieve goals. We have to begin by committing to a certain path of performance and only then can we use consequences to keep us on the proper path.

Perceptions

By Rabbi Pinchas Winston

Parshas Miketz

Thinking Deeper

I have mentioned several times in the past that when Yosef, as Viceroy of Egypt, accused his brothers of being meraglim—spies, it was a coded message. Each of the Hebrew letters—Mem-Raish-Gimmel-Lamed-Yud-Mem—stood for a different word, the coded message being: M'Immi Rachel genavtem, I'Midianim Yishmael mechartem—from my mother Rachel you stole me; to Midianites, Arabs you sold me. Not bad, eh?

And the brothers were supposed to figure that out off the bat? They had just gotten down to Egypt and it was the first thing to go wrong. That the man standing before them dressed and acting Egyptian and wielding so much power as Yosef was the last thing they could have imagined at that point. So what was the point of Yosef's encoded message?

It wasn't for that moment. It was for later, after they had gone through enough to make them start to question what was really going on, which they began to do once they found their money in their sacks on their way back home. Until that time, they were still in their own world and only asked the questions they wanted to. Freaking them out with weird events forced them to start asking questions they didn't want to.

After all, "necessity is the mother of invention." Why invent something new when the old works well enough? It's only once people suffer for reasons they can't figure out that they go looking for answers, answers that often lead to other questions and then other answers.

And not just for things that are currently happening, or will in the future, but also retroactively. The brain has a remarkable way of doing that, of taking new information and using it to solve old puzzles, sometimes even unconsciously. When Yosef accused his brothers of being spies, he was planting the seeds of future revelations.

Still, even if the brothers had begun to suspect that the Viceroy was Yosef, a big leap of faith to begin with, breaking the world meraglim down into six separate words that told the tale of his sale and enslavement was an even bigger leap. It would have been like figuring out the winning number of a lottery in advance using mathematics. It might be possible, but the odds are heavily against being right, even for the smartest person in the world.

But you can't believe how many things you enjoy in life whose discovery had similar odds. Some were just the result of trial and error, lots of trial and error. Others were discovered more quickly because of some "lucky" circumstance. But since we don't believe in luck at all, because everything is a function of Divine Providence, we have to assume that God decided to give the discoverer a break by speeding up the right result.

It works the same with insights as well. If I had a dollar for every time an insight came to me because of some unplanned circumstance, I could almost retire. I'm talking about getting the idea for a parsha sheet or an entire book because I happened to be thinking about something at a bus stop while a bus went by with an advertisement on the side. The advertisement had nothing to do with the idea I was thinking about, but seeing it at exactly the same time I was thinking about an idea somehow led to a new insight.

Yosef had known that if he got his brothers started, they would ask the questions, maybe even do a little teshuvah and warrant the necessary Divine Providence to work out the puzzle. In fact, one of the best ways to know if you're going in the right direction in life is how God helps you connect the dots in whatever you're doing right. Somehow life, history, a book, a person, or even the most unusual thing will make some impression on you to move your thinking in the right direction.

Because knowledge is just light, Divine light. But being holy, it can only flow to people according to their level of holiness. The more fitting a vessel is spiritually speaking, the greater and more insightful the light will be. The higher a person ascends spiritually, the higher the spiritual light they can access will be.

This is what it means that the Ohr HaGanuz, the Primordial Light that God hid on Day One of Creation from the evil history, can be found in the thirty-six Ner Shel Chanukah. Obviously, it is not a physical thing, but a spiritual one, not something seen with the physical eye but the mind's eye. And the thing about the mind's eye is that it opens only as wide as a person's heart does for truth.

Countless times throughout history, people have come to know far more knowledge than they actually learned, more sophisticated knowledge than they should have been able to. We don't notice it much in our own lives because most people never try to know or understand much more than they need to in order to get by in life. So God says, "If they don't want to know, why should I tell them?"

Want to know, so God will tell you...and you will be more than amazed by what He has to say. A freileichen Chanukah.

Drasha

By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Parshas Miketz

A Higher Calling

This week's parsha follows the miraculous rise of Yosef from the time he is pulled from the pit of an Egyptian jail and transformed to the viceroy of Egypt. The story of this rise is fascinating. And all it took was a Pharaoh and a dream!

Pharaoh wakes up one morning quite disturbed. He just finished dreaming about seven skinny cows that devoured seven succulent ones. He goes back to sleep and a variation of the dream is repeated again featuring a theme of mismatched consumption. In the second dream, seven lean stalks devour seven full-bodied ones. This time Pharaoh cannot go back to bed.

In frenzy, Pharaoh summons his sorcerers, wise men and magicians. Each offers his interpretation. The Torah tells us that, "none of them interpreted the dreams for Pharaoh" (Genesis 41:8). The words "for Pharaoh" beg explanation. After all, to whom else were they trying to explain the dreams Nebuchadnezer? The Torah should have just said, "none of them were able to interpret the dreams."

Rashi explains that the magic men did in fact interpret the dreams: however, "not for Pharaoh." They may have had very creative interpretations, but none was fitting for Pharaoh. Pharaoh refused to buy into them as he felt that the interpretations were irrelevant. One magician claimed that the dreams symbolized seven daughters. Seven daughters would be born to Pharaoh, and seven would die. Another sorcerer claimed that the dreams represent both Pharaoh's military prowess and failure. Pharaoh would capture seven countries and seven countries would revolt. However, Pharaoh rejected those solutions. Rashi says that they did not even enter his ears. None of those dreams was applicable to Pharaoh. But why? Is there nothing more important to Pharaoh than his own family? Is there nothing more relevant to Pharaoh than his military acumen and victories. Why did Pharaoh reject those interpretations out of hand as irrelevant?

Reb Yaakov Kamenetzky had just received wonderful news that his dear colleague and friend, Reb Moshe Feinstein, had come home from the hospital. Reb Yaakov went to call the venerable sage and personally extend his good wishes. Reb Yaakov, who never had an attendant make calls for him, went to the telephone and dialed. The line was busy. A few minutes later, he tried again. The line was still busy. In fact, Reb Yaakov called repeatedly during the course of the next hour, but Rabbi Feinstein's line was constantly busy. "Perhaps," thought Reb Yaakov, "many people are calling to wish him well."

One of his grandchildren who was present during the frustrating scenario asked Reb Yaakov a simple question.

"I don't understand," he asked. "Aren't there times that it is imperative that you speak to Reb Moshe? After all, you sit together on the Moetzes Gedolei HaTorah (The Council of Torah Sages). What would happen if there were a matter of national significance that required immediate attention? Shouldn't Reb Moshe get a second telephone line?"

Reb Yaakov smiled. "Of course Reb Moshe has a special private line. And I, in fact, have the telephone number. But that line is to be used solely for matters relating to Klall Yisroel. I now wish to extend my good wishes to Reb Moshe on a personal level. And I can't use his special line for that. So I will dial and wait until his published number becomes available."

The Sifsei Chachomim explains the Rashi. Pharaoh understood that when he dreams, be it about cows or stalks, he dreams not on a personal vein. As ruler of an entire kingdom, his divine inspiration is not intended as a message regarding seven daughters or new military conquests. His dreams ring of messages for his entire nation.

The attitude of a leader is to understand that there are two telephones in his life. Even Pharaoh understood that the ring of a dream must focus on a larger picture the welfare of his people. For when it comes to the message on the Klall phone, a true leader understands that the message does not ring on his personal wall, but rather it rings with a message for the masses.

Good Shabbos

Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

[added by CS

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Potomac Torah Study Center

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May Hashem protect Israel and Jews everywhere during 5785. May Hashem's protection shine on all of Israel, the IDF, and Jews throughout the world – and may our hostages soon return from captivity. May the stunning collapse of the Assad regime in Syria and the cease fire with Lebanon be the beginning of better news for Israel and Jews in coming days.

Hanukkah always comes close to the winter solstice – days with the fewest hours of sunlight during the year. We most frequently read Miketz during the week that includes the beginning of Hanukkah. How do the winter solstice and Hanukkah connect with the story of Yosef's release from prison, his being brought before Paro to interpret Paro's dreams, his elevation to chief of agriculture and food for all of Egypt, and his reunions with his brothers?

I have discussed before Rabbi David Fohrman's explanation that Paro's dreams repeat in reverse Yosef's life history over the previous twenty-two years. When Yosef hears Paro's retelling of his dreams, he only needs to make one connection to understand the dreams. The numbers of beautiful and ugly cows, and beautiful and ugly stalks of wheat do not connect with anything in his life, except that the numbers fit with his father's history (working seven years for Rachel, ending up with Leah as his first wife, and then working another seven years for Rachel plus seven more years for the cattle that he earned). Yosef understands that cows and wheat in Paro's dreams mean years – if he replaces years for the wheat and cows, he has the entire meaning of the dreams before him in his own life.

How do the dreams and his life over the previous twenty plus years relate to Yosef's mission going forward? Yosef realizes that the sun and

moon bowing down to him do not represent his father, mother, and brothers. When his brothers come to purchase wheat, he realizes that God sent him to Egypt and put him in charge of the food to save his family during the famine. Yosef works hard to find a way to move away from past disputes, avoid any discussion of fault, and bring all the brothers together with love. Yosef's goal is what we Jews need today, when our brothers (extended Jewish family) spent too much time on disputes and not enough time working for a stronger Judaism and world in which to live.

Rabbi Mordechai Rhine and Rabbi Dov Linzer (with author Abigail Pogrebin) also connect Yosef's meeting with his brothers and Hanukkah with machloket (disputes) among Jews. Go to any yeshiva, and the most memorable sight is likely to be two students arguing strongly with each other over the meaning of a few words in the Gemorah (Talmud). These arguments can become very heated and go on for quite a while. Do the disputing students come to blows? No. After a time, they stop the argument and go back to the Gemorah. The classic interpretation of such disputes comes from the Pirkei Avot (Ethics of the Fathers). The followers of Hillel and Shammai would argue constantly. The Gemorah explains, "The words of both schools are the words of the living God, but the law follows the rulings of the school of Hillel." Our tradition is that disputes such as those of Hillel and Shammai are disputes for the sake of heaven while other disputes (such as those of Korach) are not for the sake of heaven and will not endure.

Rosh Yeshiva Dov Linzer and author Abigail Pogrebin also extend the history of disputes among Jews to Hanukkah and recent history. During the time of the Maccabees, the major dispute was between Orthodox Jews (the Maccabees) and assimilated Jews who followed the Syrian Greeks and abandoned many of the Jewish practices. Should the Jews of the time stick with the traditional mitzvot or blend in with the Greeks? One aspect of this dispute is whether the light from Hanukkah candles should represent fire (death of our enemies) or light (Jews working together for a better world). The winning side of this dispute is light – Jews should work toward a more inclusive and positive Jewish life. We see the distinction in Hassidic tradition. Many secular Jews consider Hanukkah to be a celebration over a military victory. Hassidic Jews, such as Chabad, however, consider Hanukkah to be a very important holiday, one focused on the beauty and joy of traditional Judaism.

Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander has emphasized many times in recent months that we Jews should move ahead, away from disputes on ritual and politics. We should focus on coming closer to benefit Klal Yisrael, share the burdens of the wars of the past 14 months, and help those of our people who have suffered the most during this period. As Rabbi Marc Angel reminds us, no matter what we Jews do, anti-Semites hate and blame us. The late Nobel laureate Saul Bellow said that Jews have never been able to take the right to live as a natural right. He said that our challenge is to take a long view of history, not to be afraid, and to live proudly as Jews. May we work together to benefit all our people. Shabbat Shalom Hanukkah Samaich, Hannah and Alan]

לע"נ

יוחנן בן יקותיאל יודא ע"ה

שרה משה בת ר' יעקב אליעזר ע"ה

ביילא בת (אריה) לייב ע"ה

אנא מלכה בת ישראל