

Mikeitz , Genesis 41:1 x44:17

Parashah Overview

- Joseph interprets Pharaoh's two dreams and predicts seven years of prosperity followed by seven years of famine. (41:1-32)
- Pharaoh places Joseph in charge of food collection and distribution. (41:37-49)
- Joseph marries Asenath, and they have two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. (41:50-52)
- When Joseph's brothers come to Egypt to buy food during the famine, Joseph accuses them of spying. He holds Simeon hostage while the rest of the brothers return to Canaan to retrieve Benjamin for him. (42:3-42:38)
- The brothers return to Egypt with Benjamin and for more food. Joseph continues the test, this time falsely accusing Benjamin of stealing and declaring that Benjamin must remain his slave. (43:1-44:17)

Transportable and Rooted

Nancy H. Wiener

As the famine persists, Jacob's sons realize that they must return to Egypt for additional provisions. Jacob is reluctant to send his sons back. He is fearful for their lives and uncertain about their safe return. As they prepare to leave, they inform their father of their need to take their youngest brother, Benjamin, with them. When he refuses, his sons tell him of their dealings with the Egyptian viceroy. In the course of the conversation, Jacob learns that his sons had, indeed, told the viceroy of their younger brother who remained in Canaan with their father. Jacob is angry and wants to know what prompted them to do this. His sons explain that the viceroy barraged them with questions, and they chose not to lie. They told the viceroy two things about their family: their father was alive, and their younger brother remained in Canaan with their father. Finally, with assurances from Judah that he would be responsible for Benjamin's well-being and safety, Jacob advises his sons about what to take with them and what to bring as gifts for the viceroy.

Noteworthy are Jacob's instructions in Genesis 43:11: K'chu mizimrat haaretz bichleichem, "Take from among the land's choice products in your bags." Most of the commentators say the phrase mizimrat haaretz refers to things of a quality worthy of praise or "melody," zemer. Rashi notes that in the Targum this is rendered as "that which is praised in the land," and he adds, "that about which people sing its praise [m'zamrim] when it comes into existence" (A. M. Silbermann, Chumash with Rashi's Commentary : Bereishit [Jerusalem: Feldheim, 1934], p.

214). The root word zemer, zayinxmemxreish, coupled with the last word of the phrase, bichleichem, raises the possibility of an interesting double entendre. While bichleichem can be understood as referring to their gear or luggage, an alternate translation is "with [or in] their instruments." A translation of the phrase might focus on Jacob saying to his sons, "Take with you [from] the melody of the land along with your instruments."

Jacob's sons are going to foreign territory, so he wants to be sure that they take their own cultural heritage with them. While they can produce any kind of music on their instruments, their father instructs them to take the song of their land with them, first and foremost.

"Take the song of the land along with your instruments." Jacob, perhaps, understands that songs are, at one and the same time, transportable and rooted. Centuries later, the exiles in Babylonia would have benefited from this insight as they sat by the waters of Babylon lamenting, "How can we sing God's song in a foreign land?" (Psalm 137:4).

At a nursing home where I used to work, we had services every Friday afternoon for Kabbalat Shabbat. The residents, in their varying degrees of physical and mental decline, were wheeled into the room we used for services. People who were unable to participate in conversations, as well as people who were unable to orient themselves to person, place, or time, were able to connect to the music of prayer and sing along. The words, the tunes, were a part of them, and as their lips moved, a light of recognition and connection shone in their eyes and in their faces. They were in that moment of music and, at the same time, so far removed from it that it would have been impossible to call them back. As Debbie Friedman's interpretation of Reb Nachman of Bratzlav's prayer expresses it, all would sing their souls through the long-familiar Ur tunes of their lives.

Perhaps Jacob sends his sons off with their instruments and these instructions because he wants to ensure that they will not lose their connection to the songs of their land, their people. If they continue to play them, they will long for their country and their families and dream of their own safe return. Or, perhaps, Jacob is intrigued by the conversation that his sons related to him. Who is this man in Egypt who asked specifically about his sons' father and brother, this man who inquired about whether or not their father was still alive? The questions were certainly unusual, particularly coming from a man of such stature. Perhaps if his sons go down to Egypt and play their instruments and sing the song of the land from which they come, this man will respond positively. Perhaps they will evoke some chord of

recognition and pleasure in him. Perhaps they will reveal his true nature.

Rabbi Leizer survived the death camps and returned to his hometown, Czenstochow, Poland. For years following the Shoah, he roamed the streets playing a hand organ. At regular intervals, amid the numerous tunes he played, he would intentionally play Kol Nidrei. As he did so, he would look into the eyes of the children who walked by, looking for a hint of recognition. In this way, he was able to bring many children back in contact with their people (as told in Corinne da Fonseca-Wolheim, "The Soul Breath of Kol Nidre," *Jewish World Digest*, September 20, 2006).

All of us have had the experience of hearing a tune that we have not heard in a long time and finding ourselves transported back to a time and place long removed from our current circumstances. Some tunes, some notes, resonate so deeply that they evoke a profound sense of coming home or being at home. They bring tears to our eyes and give us an intense sense of belonging.

What are the tunes that speak to our lives? Are they the songs that reveal who we are?

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Tabaato —His Ring Harry Rosenfeld

Most of us know the story of Joseph's rise to power in Egypt. On the recommendation of his chief butler, Pharaoh has Joseph interpret his dreams. Joseph interprets the dreams of the seven years of plenty followed by the seven years of famine and presents Pharaoh with a plan to manage Egypt's resources. As a reward, Pharaoh elevates Joseph to be second in power only to Pharaoh.

Symbolizing Joseph's new position, the Torah says: "Pharaoh removed his signet ring from his hand and put it on Joseph's hand" (Genesis 41:42). The Hebrew word used for "ring," *tabaat*, is not a common word in the Tanach. Mostly it is used to describe the rings fashioned in the building of the Tabernacle and the Ark. Only twice is *tabaat* used in the creation of human relationships.

First, in Mikeitz, Pharaoh makes Joseph his "junior partner." Second, in the Book of Esther, King Ahasuerus of Persia gives his ring to Haman, making Haman second only

to the king (Esther 3:10); later, Ahasuerus gives the ring to Mordecai (Esther 8:2).

In each human-relationship example, the passing of a *tabaat* involves the transfer of power and the establishment of a partnership where one party remains more powerful than the other. Historically, Jewish men have given their wives *tabaot* in the marriage ceremony, creating an unequal sharing of power. Our modern double-ring wedding and commitment ceremonies reflect, as they should, the creation of an equal partnership between two partners based not only on love, friendship, and respect, but also on an equal sharing of responsibility and decision making.

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THE END IS ALSO THE TURNING POINT

Laura Geller

Miketz, at the end, is the turning point, the beginning of the end of the Joseph story.

Joseph has spent two years in prison invisible and forgotten. Prison is like the pit where he was thrown by his brothers years before, a place where his brother Reuben said of him: The lad is not (*Einenu*). As Aviva Zornberg points out in *The Genesis of Desire*, Joseph's struggle, from the pit until now, has been his struggle with being *einenu*, nonexistent.

Then Pharaoh dreams his dreams and needs an interpreter. Joseph is remembered and summoned from prison. Not only does Joseph interpret the dream as a prediction of the future, something he has done before, but he also tells Pharaoh what to do in response to the prediction.

Pharaoh appoints Joseph to oversee the management of food resources, making him the second most powerful man in Egypt. He marries Potiphar's daughter (imagine how that made Mrs. Potiphar feel!) and has two sons. It would seem that Joseph has made it big, forgotten his Hebrew family, transcended his childhood traumas and his terror of nonexistence.

But the names of his sons tell a different story: Manasseh, "for God has made me forget all my toil and all of my father's house," and Ephraim, "for God has made me fruitful in the land of my affliction." Joseph tries to forget, but he can't.

His brothers come to Egypt to get food. He recognizes them, but he is unrecognizable. They describe themselves as "twelve brothers; the youngest, however, is now with our father, and one is not (*einenu*). He accuses them of being

spies. He demands that they bring Benjamin, his full brother, to Egypt. They understand this as punishment for their treatment of Joseph long ago. When Joseph hears this, he has to turn away so they don't see his tears. His brothers have changed, he begins to realize. They still think of him. He is not einenu, gone from them. He has not been forgotten. The midrash develops this idea: They have come to Egypt for two reasons -for food, of course, but also to find their lost brother Joseph.

Another midrash describes his meeting with Benjamin. Benjamin explains how the names of each of his sons reflect the longing Benjamin has for his beloved Joseph. Again Joseph has to leave the room so he doesn't see him cry.

The tears, the turning point, the beginning of the end - all are Joseph's realization that he has not been forgotten. He is not yet ready to forgive, but, knowing he was never really gone, he begins to reclaim himself.

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GOOD OLD-FASHIONED FAMILY VALUES *by Karen Trager*

Strengthening Jewish identity is a paramount Jewish goal, and examining the Jewish family offers us both answers and questions to explore. Parashat Miketz provides a treasure trove of themes: what were the issues for Joseph and his family, and how do their experiences challenge us today?

What's in a name?

Pharaoh gives Joseph an important Egyptian name (41:45) signifying Joseph's role; Joseph names his sons to underscore his feelings about his life (41:51-52). What are your family's names? What are their stories? (My grandparents named my uncle, the firstborn son, Mordechai Moses - a name rife with symbolic Jewish and family heritage. The hospital recorded his name as Harold Mordechai; and so - what else could they have done? - his family forever after called him Bill!)

Who shall go and who shall remain? Jacob chooses (42:1-4)

When Jacob realized that Egyptian grain might save his family, how did he decide who to send on the life-saving errand? Why not go himself? Why send ten sons? And why not Benjamin?

Who did your family send? Under what circumstances? (My Dad's 13-year-old father brought his mother out of pogrom-filled Russia, across the ocean via steerage, and found the hutzpa to survive - and succeed - in the new land. How many of today's Bar/Bat Mitzvah youth would attempt such a feat?)

Who is the mourner? (42:36)

Jacob acts as if the losses of his three sons affected only him. How does your family experience loss? Is grieving something that family members prefer to experience alone? With others? How does your family practice Jewish grieving and mourning customs? What about reciting kaddish? (As a 14-year-old, fresh from my first experience as part of a Jewish summer camp community of mourners, I naturally stood for the mourner's kaddish at our Conservative synagogue at home - and was shocked when so many people approached me to inquire whether something tragic had happened to my parents. At that synagogue, only immediate family stood for the mourner's kaddish.)

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LETTING GOD INTO OUR LIVES *Judith Kahan Rowland*

In Parashat Miketz, we find ourselves in the middle of one of the most complete and compelling human stories in the Book of Genesis. Unlike the narratives about Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, however, a large section of the Joseph story contains no mention of God.

In last week's Torah portion, Vayeshev, we get to know Joseph, the youngest and most favored son in a clearly dysfunctional family. Although his father Jacob had several one-on-one encounters with God, it does not seem that God resides within this family. Motivated by jealousy and hatred, Joseph's brothers sell him to Ishmaelites on their way down to Egypt. Certainly God was not present when they plotted his fate, and God is also absent as Joseph journeys down to Egypt.

God is not a part of Joseph's first encounter with Egyptian life as the head of Potiphar's household and Parashat Vayeshev ends with Joseph back in prison after he had been set up by Potiphar's wife in a false accusation of sexual harassment. Now, at the beginning of this week's parashah, Joseph is still in prison after two long years. Apparently, during that time, Joseph has finally allowed the God of his ancestors to enter his life and at the same time has gained a healthy sense of humility. When called upon by Pharaoh to

interpret his disquieting dreams, Joseph responds, "Not I; God will see to Pharaoh's welfare." (Genesis 41:16)

Pharaoh is clearly impressed by Joseph's skillful interpretations and his brilliant marketing plan. But what is it exactly that sets Joseph's interpretations apart from those of all the wise men of Egypt? After all, Pharaoh's dreams don't seem that difficult to figure out. The answer lies in Joseph's faith. So passionate is Joseph's belief in God that he is elevated from the depths of the dungeon to the position of Pharaoh's second in command.

Like a good novel, the big picture slowly emerges-and it is God's big picture. Joseph's brothers reenter the story as they journey down to Egypt in search of food. Now Joseph will be able to save his family and continue the unfolding of God's plans as revealed to Abraham.

How often we meet people that have no room for God in their lives? They believe that their successes are of their own hands and therefore, have nowhere to turn when their lives take a fall. Was this not Joseph's problem? As long as God was not in Joseph's life-as long as Joseph was so full of himself-his life was one pitfall after another. Not until Joseph allowed God in was his destiny fulfilled and his family reunited.

Allowing God to enter our lives can provide us with a sense of humility, an ethical framework, and a passion for all that life has to offer. It is a lesson we can all learn from.

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DO YOU TRUST ME?

Elisa Bergenfeld

As we read the Torah, it is interesting to note how relationships are established between the characters themselves, as well as with God. Many times we can use these positive examples as models for forming relationships in our own lives or as lessons on how to be more cautious when such situations arise. Parashat Miketz is all about the relationships between employers and employees, between siblings, and between parents and their children. As everyone knows, an important part of every good relationship is trust. But how do we know whom we can trust and what we should do if that trust has been broken?

Let's look at this week's parashah to derive a greater understanding of the following questions:

Who is worthy of your trust?

Joseph was taken out of prison to interpret Pharaoh's dreams. Pharaoh was so impressed by Joseph's interpretation that he elevated Joseph to a position of very high authority. In fact, Pharaoh says, "Only with respect to the throne shall I be superior to you." (Gen. 41:40) It is interesting to consider why Pharaoh trusted Joseph's interpretation. What made Pharaoh believe that Joseph would be a good leader? After all, not only was he a Hebrew, he had also been accused of committing a heinous crime.

Several commentators have suggested that Pharaoh trusted Joseph because his interpretation was very different from those offered by his own magicians. Joseph not only listened carefully, he also established a precise plan of action for dealing with the problem presented in the dream. Pharaoh was so impressed by Joseph's leadership qualities that he quickly put Joseph in charge.

Discussion Questions

1. Why do you think that Pharaoh trusted Joseph?
2. What makes you feel that someone is trustworthy?
3. What qualities make a good leader?

Is it possible to gain back someone's trust?

To help us answer the question, we can look at the first meeting between Joseph and his brothers when they came to Egypt looking for food. Although Joseph had had a very good life in Egypt, he still resented his brothers and was hurt by what they had done to him. Although Joseph could have just revealed himself as their brother and given them their rations, he chose instead to create a meticulous plan in order to test their loyalty. He wanted to make sure that they truly felt remorse for what they had done to him and that they would not treat Benjamin the way they had treated him. They had to prove themselves worthy of a reconciliation with their brother.

Discussion Questions

1. Did Joseph do the right thing by testing his brothers' loyalty? Was the test too severe?
2. Do you think that we should test people in order to determine whether we can trust them?
3. If so, what would you do to test another person's loyalty?

What would you be willing to do to gain someone's trust? The brothers returned to Jacob without Simeon. They told their father that the "man who is lord" of Egypt made them leave Simeon behind to guarantee that they would return with Benjamin. (Genesis 42:30) Jacob refused to let them take Benjamin. He did not trust his sons to take away Benjamin because they had already taken away the first of Rachel's two sons. Reuben felt very guilty about what had happened to Joseph. Trying to gain his father's

trust, Reuben told Jacob that if anything happened to Benjamin, Jacob could put Reuben's own two sons to death if Reuben did not bring Benjamin back to their father. (Genesis 42:37) The thought of losing another member of his family did not lay Jacob's fears to rest. Although Jacob finally agreed to let them take Benjamin, we know that in doing so, he was wary and disheartened: "As for me, if I am to be bereaved, I shall be bereaved." (Genesis 43:14)

Discussion Questions

1. Why did Jacob finally relent?
2. What do you think about Reuben's offer?
3. How far would you go to gain back someone's trust?
4. Do you think that the effort is always worth it?
5. Is it possible to gain back someone's trust if you have betrayed that person?

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TO SEE OR NOT TO SEE

Peter B. Schaktman

For though Joseph recognized his brothers, they did not recognize him. (Genesis 42:8)

With the famine in Canaan at a critical point, Jacob's sons travel to Egypt to procure food. They are given an opportunity to plead their case before Pharaoh's vizier, their brother Joseph. When they enter the room, Joseph immediately realizes who they are, although they do not recognize him.

How could this be? How could not one of the ten brothers standing before Joseph identify him? Had Joseph changed that much?

Our tradition offers at least three possible explanations for this odd occurrence, each of which, in turn, raises many new questions about how we interpret - and often misinterpret - reality.

Explanation I: The Man

Some sages tell us that Joseph's physical appearance had indeed changed since the brothers had last seen him. A boy of seventeen when he had been abandoned, Joseph was now a man of thirty, bearded and more mature in appearance. Other commentators focus on the numerous ways in which Joseph had assumed the fashions and appearances of the Egyptians. But what if the cause of the brothers' failure to recognize Joseph was not Joseph at all but rather their own blind spots, their own inability to perceive what was literally before their eyes?

Indeed, at least one commentator suggests that while the brothers' memory of the young Joseph they had left to die may have faded over the years, the older Joseph closely resembled the very familiar countenance of their father (Zar Zahav). Did they, in fact, "see" Jacob in Joseph? How might that have been an obstacle to recognition rather than a clue?

Explanation II: The Context

According to another commentator, the reason the brothers didn't recognize Joseph is that even if it had occurred to them that their brother might still be alive, it would never have occurred to them to find him in this place or in such a high position. To what extent do we make assumptions about people based on the position in which we encounter them?

On the other hand, perhaps the reason that the brothers failed to recognize Joseph was that they were so focused on this place and on their own needs that they missed something that should have been obvious to them. Or might it have been that, riddled by guilt for what they had done, they had so often "seen" Joseph in other people that they no longer paid attention to such sightings? Rashi raises the question of whether or not the brothers had ever really "seen" Joseph. If they had, could they have acted as they did?

To what extent are the people we regularly encounter invisible to us? Could we walk past someone sleeping on the street if we really saw that person? In what ways do we fail to recognize people who might be our brethren? People who can help us? People whom we have wronged or abandoned?

As in the case of the brothers and Joseph, we see such people but we do not recognize them, for in order to do so, we need to see parts of ourselves to which we prefer to shut our eyes. We cannot recognize the people we have wronged without also seeing ourselves as wrongdoers, and that is very difficult to do.

In this situation, the brothers saw themselves as the vulnerable party - after all, they were the ones who were hungry and entirely dependent on the kindness of one whom they assumed to be a stranger. How often does our own perception of ourselves as vulnerable stand in the way of our examining our behavior toward others - the members of our family, the people with whom we work, and the people among whom we dwell?

Explanation III: The Disguise

This last explanation suggests that Joseph's invisibility to his brothers was his own doing. *Vayitnaker*, the text tells us:

"He acted like a stranger toward them." (Genesis 42:7) How so? At least two commentators suggest that Joseph actually disguised himself by pulling his hat over his face (Ramban) and by changing his voice (Rashbam).

Why did Joseph do this? Was it, as some suggest, in order to fulfill the earlier dreams he had had? Or perhaps, as others hold, he disguised himself to give his brothers an opportunity to do teshuvah by subjecting them to the various trials and tribulations that he proceeded to inflict upon them.

Perhaps Joseph disguised himself because he was ambivalent about being recognized, about having to acknowledge his own familial responsibilities. Perhaps it was at that moment that Joseph recognized his own transgression in never having made an attempt to contact his father or even to let him know that he was still alive. How often do we take the easy way out of facing up to our obligations as parents, children, spouses, and ex-spouses?

The meeting between Joseph and his brothers pointedly reminds us that truly seeing requires more than mere sight and that real comprehension begins with a better understanding of ourselves.

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JOSEPH: SEPARATE AND ALONE

Keren Alpert

In Parashat Miketz, we encounter the narrative at a truly dramatic time. Having successfully interpreted Pharaoh's dreams, Joseph has become a vizier in Pharaoh's court and is financially and socially successful. (Genesis 41:37-45)

How do we as Jews separate ourselves from non-Jews?

Joseph, the dreamer, is the only Jew in town. Although he has been assimilated into Egyptian society and has married an Egyptian woman, he is lonely. He does not even eat with the Egyptians since "that would be abhorrent" to them. (Genesis 43:32) Therefore, symbolically perhaps, he dines alone, away from his colleagues and away from his family.

1. Are there times when the non-Jewish world does not understand the importance of Friday night or of major Jewish holidays and, as a result, conflict is created?
2. Do the laws of kashrut separate us from non-Jews? How?
3. Are there times when it is important for us to be apart from the rest of the world and times for us to be together? Give examples of such times.

How has Joseph separated himself from his family?

Compiled by Brattleboro Area Jewish Community, Tevet 5767.
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Joseph's pain is always just beneath the surface. Although the episode of his brothers' abuse of him is in the far past, Joseph still remembers it everyday, as witnessed by the names that he has given his sons, which remind him of his tragic adolescence: Manasseh, which means "God has made me forget completely my hardship and my parental home," and Ephraim, which means "God has made me fertile in the land of my affliction." (Genesis 41:51-52) What names! What memories! What a festering sore is the unfinished business of Joseph and his brothers!

Joseph's brothers come to Egypt in search of food. They approach Joseph, who recognizes them and provides for their needs. But the brothers do not recognize Joseph! Truly, Joseph has separated himself both physically and emotionally from his family.

1. How do you think Joseph's appearance has changed?
2. What could have "blinded" the brothers so that they could not see Joseph?

How can a family heal after great tragedy?

Intent on revenge but yearning even more for contact with the only family he has in the world, Joseph tests his brothers to see if they have changed since they sold him into slavery. Indeed they have. They are loyal to and protective of Joseph's full brother, Benjamin, and they have not forgotten the harm that they have done to Joseph.

1. Why is Jacob's advancing age such an important factor to Joseph and his decision to forgive his brothers?
2. Why does Joseph forgive his brothers?
3. What are the steps of teshuvah that the brothers have taken prior to their being forgiven?

Joseph, the lonely dreamer, sees all: He has seen the future of Egypt and he now sees the true identity of his brothers. He experiences the pervading loneliness of his life, being the only Jew in Egypt, and he resolves to repair the breach with his family.

By saving his brothers, Joseph has saved all the Jewish people. Through his reunion with his family, the Jewish people are once again unified. Joseph, the dreamer, performs the work of God, the Ultimate Dreamer.

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LESSONS FROM THE PAST

Uri Regev

Much has been written in recent years about the dysfunctional families of Genesis -- the founding families

of the Jewish "tribe." Some try to deny this blemish. I remember the storm that arose in the Knesset and the Orthodox community when then Prime Minister Simon Peres dared utter moderate criticism about King David and his conduct. The storm threatened to topple Peres's government and his criticism was regarded as heretical. In my opinion, the ability to view the heroes of our nation as humans rather than angels is an element of strength and a sign of maturity. The sages and the commentators differed in this regard. Some of them attempted to idealize the past and smooth over its blemishes, while others, who courageously acknowledged the flaws in the behavior of these biblical figures, pointed to the suffering that has befallen our nation on their account and refused to ascribe all such events to a divine "grand plan."

Israel finds herself now in a similar position, battling with her past. After years of ideologically motivated Zionist education that emphasized the just struggle of the Jewish people while suppressing an acknowledgment of the rights of the Palestinians, we are now beginning to see the complexity of the struggle. We now realize that Israel did not refrain from using improper means to hide the facts from the public. Some Israelis resent this shattering of old myths and don't want to see the past revisited. Others, and I among them, feel that as Israel reaches her Jubilee, addressing with greater responsibility and integrity the challenges of the future is a reflection of national maturity.

In the Jewish tradition, Joseph is often called "Joseph the righteous." But the young Joseph of the previous *parashah* had to mature and endure much suffering before he attained this level. The account of his relationship with his brothers is not "black or white," "good guys and bad guys." The appalling behavior of his brothers, the fathers of our nation's tribes, is the direct result of continuous provocation by Joseph ("Joseph brought bad reports of them to their father" [Genesis 37:2] and "Everything bad he could tell of them, he would" [Rashi]), as well as the insensitivity of Jacob, who demonstrates excessive love for Joseph over his brothers. (The Talmud, in tractate Shabbat, ascribes to Jacob's discrimination between his sons the reason for the Israelites' descent to Egypt and instructs us that a father may not show preference for one son over another.)

Parashat Miketz shows us the transformation that occurs both in Joseph and his brothers. In spite of his wisdom, Joseph needed this face-to-face encounter with his siblings to recognize the deep void that existed in his life as a result of his having been detached from his family and to vent the intense emotions that he had suppressed during the years of his successful assimilation into the good life he found in Egypt: "He turned away from them and wept." (Genesis 42:24) The brothers, on their part, needed the horrors of

being falsely arrested to arouse in them the necessary soul searching that led them to acknowledge their grave sin toward their brother and father, which they had suppressed from their thoughts and hearts for thirteen years: "Alas, we are being punished on account of our brother, because we looked on at his anguish yet paid no heed as he pleaded with us. That is why this distress has come upon us." (Genesis 42:21)

We can derive optimism from the fact that the destructive relationship between Joseph and his brothers did not prevent their coming together as brothers, just as Isaac and Ishmael and Jacob and Esau did. As human beings, as Jews, and as Israelis, we are part of many diversified relationships. In some of them, we are the victims. In others, we are the offenders. The experiences of the ancient and recent past teach us how disputes and even battles that are just can produce hatred and bloodshed. The deeper and harsher the struggle, the more difficult it is to heal the wounds. Will we be able to learn the lesson of this text? Will we acknowledge the necessity to recognize our omissions and failures and not cover them up? Can we be sensitive to the needs and feelings of our fellow human beings before they turn into hostility toward us? At the same time, we must learn the lesson that conflicts can be reconciled and that it is worthy and imperative to invest our efforts in healing them if we have not been wise enough to preempt them. We must remember the words of the brothers in our *parashah*, "We are ? sons by the same father" (Genesis 42:32), and expand on them in the spirit of the prophet: "Have we all not one father? Did not one God create us?" (*Malachi* 2:10)

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MY SON, THE FIREMAN?

Mark L. Goldstein

Before the years of famine came, Joseph became the father of two sons, whom Asenath ... bore to him. Genesis 41:50

I was surprised when my son told me that he wanted to be a fireman when he grows up. Dad is a Jewish Federation director and mom is a Jewish studies teacher/tutor/cantor: Obviously neither profession fosters physical aggression. When queried, my son explained that we had told him to grow up and become a fireman. Every Friday night, he reminded us, we pray for God to make him like "the fireman Manasseh."

He was referring, of course, to the blessing that parents have bestowed on their children dating back to *Parashat*

Vayechi, when Jacob offered the blessing "God make you like Ephraim and Manasseh." (Genesis 48:20) Of all the role models in the Bible, why were Ephraim and Manasseh singled out to become the baseline for future generations? Would we not want our children to emulate Moses, the epitome of leadership in the face of multiple obstacles, or Abraham, the hero of every Jewish preschool lesson about monotheism? I myself have a soft spot for Noah: I would love my children to be handy with wood and tools, an area in which I am clearly challenged. But our tradition teaches us to long for children who will emulate Ephraim and Manasseh.

An explanation for why this is so can be found in *Parashat Miketz* with the birth of Ephraim and Manasseh. Until that time, Joseph seemed to have lived an assimilated life. A trusted adviser of Pharaoh, he accepted an Egyptian wife, an Egyptian name, and probably the Egyptian way of life. But he is still referred to as "the Hebrew," perhaps because he never totally abandoned the beliefs of Jacob, Isaac, and Abraham. And when his sons were born, they were born to him, Joseph, and not to the aristocracy of Egypt. Perhaps this implies that Joseph intended to raise his sons in the traditions of Abraham, not those of their maternal and idolatrous ancestors. This was no small feat. Joseph was perhaps the only Hebrew in all of Egypt. He was a former slave and an ex-con. His wife's customs and culture could easily have dictated what was practiced in the couple's household since they insured the family's wealth and highly placed position in Egyptian society. But Joseph resisted these temptations. He saw to it that his children were raised in a manner that remains the ideal for Jewish parents.

Is our tradition making the point that the offspring of a mixed marriage can produce a prodigious legacy? Whether they have one Jewish parent or two, our children must be raised in families that make a conscious decision to emulate Ephraim and Manasseh. Our Jewish communities and institutions must likewise provide programming and support that encourage active and substantive engagement. Outreach to interfaith families must become a trans-denominational, communal priority, helping them to raise Jewish children. Family life education at synagogues and JCCs must become a funding priority. The energy and resources that are being invested in Israel experiences should be replicated in Jewish camping.

So how do I feel about my son's wanting to be a fireman? Frankly, I don't care if he becomes a fireman, or a policeman, or a lawyer, or anything else. I just want him to be like Ephraim and Manasseh and allow the beauty of Judaism to permeate his whole life.

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The Art of Listening **Robert L. Rozenberg**

Although the major voices in this week's Torah portion, *Miketz*, belong to Joseph and his brothers, my attention was caught by the voice of Jacob. In Genesis 42:36, Jacob complains to his sons: "It is always me that you bereave: Joseph is no more and Simeon is no more, and now you would take away Benjamin. These things always happen to me!" Where is the voice of Israel who emerged from the divine wrestling match a changed individual? This self-centered response is more in keeping with the old Jacob. Children, even grown children, need a parent's advice, sympathy, and understanding. Rather than this expression of scorn and condemnation on Jacob's part, it seems that some sense of a shared burden would have been more appropriate.

It's not an easy thing to be a good listener. You have to overcome the tendency to think that it's all about you. Humility plays a major part in sustaining a life dialogue. The ability to understand the needs of your counterpart is essential. The sons of Jacob are experiencing their own sensations of pain, fear, and regret. Yet Jacob's anger and self-centeredness elicit only further harmful pronouncements in Genesis 42:38: "My son must not go down with you for his brother is dead and he alone is left. If he meets with disaster on the journey you are taking, you will send my white head down to Sheol in grief."

While it is true that age often increases egocentric behavior, members of the younger generations are often just as guilty. When you appear immortal in your own eyes, everything *is* always about you. Witness Joseph's insensitivity as he relates his dreams to his brothers.

We would do well to remind Jacob that we never stop being parents no matter what our children do. The conviction that bad things happen only to him impairs his ability to respond with the love and respect of a parent reaching out to his children. The prophet Malachi wrote: "[God] shall reconcile parents with children and children with their parents.?" (3:24)

After this initial negative outburst, Jacob begins to speak in a pragmatic manner: "Then their father Israel said to them, 'If it must be so, do this.?' (Genesis 43:11) Note that this is the voice of Israel, not Jacob-the Israel who was changed by the struggle with the stranger. The patriarch now seems to accept his fate with greater equanimity: "As for me, if I am to be bereaved, I shall be bereaved." (Genesis 43:14)

This narrative indicates to me that sometimes we must first use the voice of Jacob in order to get to the voice of Israel. It reminds us all that our parenting and listening skills are works in progress.

Questions for Discussion

1. Do you think that Jacob's outburst in Genesis 42:36 is justified?
2. Remorse weighs heavily on Joseph's brothers. Is this feeling a negative or positive emotion? Does it help them to grow? If so, how?
3. When dealing with elderly parents and their insecurities, how can we reassure them? What can we do to allay their anxieties?

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