

(Dvar Torah continued from front page...)

evidence is his silence and inaction. Before leaving to find his brothers, he speaks with his father. When he reaches Shechem, he speaks to the man who find him there. But from the moment he finds his brothers to his being taken away to Egypt, he says nothing. He does not ask them what they are doing or why, he does not cry out for them to stop, and he doesn't bemoan his situation. He seems to accept it all, if not expect it. Whether or not he has seen the specifics, he seems confident it will turn out alright.

For the cupbearer and baker, however, Joseph not only explains the general message of the dreams, but also how and when they will come true. He delivers the pronouncements flatly, and both the cupbearer and baker accept them wordlessly, further indication of their collective belief that the future cannot be altered - either due to its very nature or the limited options available to an imprisoned man with only 3 days to live.

For Pharaoh's dreams Joseph again interprets both their meaning and the how and when they will come true. But here, something changes. Even though the dream says that the seven bad years will fully consume the good years, such that "no trace of the abundance will be left in the land because of the famine thereafter" and that "the matter has been determined by God" he convinces Pharaoh that it is nevertheless possible to avert the negative prophecy, if only he adopts Joseph's plan and puts a certain guy in charge of it all.

But if human action can change Egypt's future, that opens up the possibility that the brothers' actions had altered Joseph's future, and Joseph is roused to action. After meeting 10 of his brothers, he sets in motion a complex and convoluted plan to get them to bring Benjamin, the 11th (42:20). Why? Because in his first dream (37:7) ALL of the brothers' wheat sheafs bowed down to his! When all of the brothers are present in Egypt, Joseph's first dream has come true. But in order to make the second come true, Joseph must reveal himself to his brothers and get them to convince Jacob and Leah (and the rest of Jacob's house) to come down to Egypt (45:9). Why? Because in his second dream (37:9) the Sun and Moon bowed to him as well!

Over the course of his life, Joseph goes from one who sees, to one who interprets, to one who acts. He understands that the future is not always given; human action can prevent a negative prophecy from coming true, a positive prophecy from coming true, and can even fix a prophecy that has been broken.

As Rabbi Akiva says in Pirkei Avot: "Everything is foreseen, and free will is given." And as Rabbi Nachman of Breslov taught: "if you believe that you can damage something, believe you can fix it".



## TORAH SPARKS

### Parashat Mikkets

### Shabbat Hanukkah

### Shabbat Mevarekhim Hahodesh

December 16, 2017 | 28 Kislev 5778

Annual | Genesis 41:1-44:17 (Etz Hayim p. 250-270; Hertz p. 155-166)  
 Triennial | Genesis 41:53-43:15 (Etz Hayim p. 257-265; Hertz p. 158-163)  
 Maftir | Numbers 7:30-35 (Etz Hayim p. 809; Hertz p. 599)  
 Haftarah | Zehariah 2:14-4:7 (Etz Hayim p. 1269-1272; Hertz p. 987-989)

## Dvar Torah

*Rabbi Andy Shapiro Katz, CY Director of North American Engagement*

Sigmund Freud considered dreams the "royal road to the unconscious" - glimpses of the way we wrestle with repressed material our ego hides from our conscious minds. For Freud, it is the dreamer who is revealed to the dream interpreter.

It would appear that this is how Joseph's brothers understand dreams - the bowing wheat and celestial bodies signs that Joseph wants to, expects to, or thinks he already does rule over them. So they resent him, mock him, and punish him, taking the one who thinks he is above them, and casting him down.

But perhaps the real reason the brothers seek Joseph's death, and eventually sell him into slavery, is that they fear that Joseph's dreams reveal the future itself, not just how the dreamer feels about the past or present. If so, the brothers' act is their desperate attempt to avert the prophecy.

But did Joseph know that his dreams were visions of the future? When Joseph tells his brother about his dreams, he does so without interpretation, so it is unclear if Joseph has already seen how everything is to unfold. Our only

# Dvar Haftarah

*Rabbi Mordechai Silverstein, Conservative Yeshiva Faculty*

The special haftarah for Hanukkah was taken from the prophet Zechariah, who lived during the period of Shivat Zion (the return from Babylonian exile). His was a period when the homeland was being rebuilt and life was filled with insecurity. Was the leadership of the new community up to the responsibility? Did the newly reclaimed homeland have international recognition? Did it have God's imprimatur? The people, after suffering the Babylonian conquest and seventy years of exile, were troubled by these questions and more. Zechariah, in his various prophecies, attempted to answer his people's anxieties. The prophecy chosen for Hanukkah opens with a bit of cheerleading to rally the people: "Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion, for behold, I come and I will dwell in your midst, says the Lord." (2:14) The prophet clearly wanted his people to know they were not alone and that God would inspire in them the strength to fulfill their destiny.

The following rabbinic parable was inspired by this verse: "A parable about a royal woman whose husband the king, her sons and her sons-in-law all went for a journey abroad. One-day, messengers came and said to queen: 'You sons are returning'. She replied: 'What does this matter to me? Let my daughters-in-law rejoice.' When her sons-in-law returned, they said: 'Your sons-in-law have returned.' She responded: 'What does this matter to me. Let my daughters rejoice.' They then said: 'The king, your husband, has returned.' She rejoiced and said: 'What an incredibly joyous occasion.' So, sometime in the future, the prophets will come and say to Jerusalem: 'Your children shall be brought from afar' (Isaiah 60:4) and she will reply to them: 'Why should that matter to me?' 'And your daughters like babes on shoulders' (Ibid.) And she (Jerusalem) will say to them: 'This does not matter to me.' When they say to her: 'Lo, your King (God) is coming to you' (Zechariah 9:9) Jerusalem will reply: 'I am elated. My joy is total,' as it says: 'Rejoice greatly, Fair Zion.' (Ibid.) and it is written: 'Shout for joy, fair Zion.' (2:14)" (adapted from Shir HaShirim Rabbah 1:30)

In this parable, Jerusalem is portrayed as a royal woman whose husband, the king, has presumably gone off to war. She is filled with anxiety at being alone, bereft of her closest companion. Only his safe return would provide her with solace and joy. With his return came a restored sense of security. So, too, it is God's restored relationship with his city, Jerusalem, that will return a sense of security and joy to the city.

In problematic times, people seek affirmation, support and security when they must meet great challenges and need to move forward. It is hard to face constructive goals without them. Nations are no different. May the light of Hanukkah signal the support, both divine and human, that we need to meet the challenges that face us.

# Table Talk

*Vered Hollander-Goldfarb, Conservative Yeshiva Faculty*

This Parasha is usually read on Hanukkah. Joseph is rushed to Pharaoh to interpret his dreams. He helps prepare Egypt for an impending famine, and meets his brothers while disguised as an Egyptian. Benjamin eventually comes down to Egypt, and all seems well until Joseph's silver goblet is stolen by... Benjamin?!

- 1) Joseph seems to meet dreams everywhere (his own, the baker and cupbearer, Pharaoh). In all of them the dreamer is somehow present himself in the dream. What might be the significance of that?
- 2) Pharaoh is so impressed that Joseph is able to tell Pharaoh the meaning of the dreams that he appoints him second to the king (41:39-46). What would you have expected him to do for himself once he is a position of power and no longer a slave? If you know the rest of the story – does he do this? What might be his reason?
- 3) Joseph's brothers come to Egypt to buy food, and are arrested on suspicion of espionage. How do they explain to themselves why this happened to them (42:21-22)? Why do they link these 2 situations?
- 4) When Jacob finally relents and allows Benjamin to go down to Egypt he hopes that the Egyptian man will 'let go your other brother and Benjamin' (43:14). Who do you think that Jacob was referring to in his words 'your other brother'?
- 5) When the head of Joseph's household catches up to the brothers and accuses them of repaying good with evil by taking the special goblet, the brothers refute it with a logical statement (44:3-9). What had they done that should have made the idea that they stole it ridiculous?

*At the Conservative Yeshiva in Jerusalem we offer students of all backgrounds an opportunity to engage with Jewish texts in a dynamic, inclusive, and collaborative environment. We help students gain the skills necessary for Jewish learning and spiritual growth as individuals and in their communities in North America, Israel, and around the world.*

We welcome your comments: [torahsparks@uscj.org](mailto:torahsparks@uscj.org)