

PARSHAH SUMMARY & COMMENTARY

Mikeitz

Genesis 41:1-44:17

Torah Reading for Week of December 21-27, 2003

"And it came to pass at the end (*mikeitz*) of two years, and Pharaoh was dreaming..."

Thirteen years after Joseph's own dreams got him sold into slavery, and two years after his interpretation of the Chief Butler's and Chief Baker's dreams failed to get him out of prison, the saga of Joseph is moved along by another pair of dreams—these dreamt by Pharaoh the king of Egypt.

In his first dream, Pharaoh sees himself "standing over the 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 brink of the River.

And the ugly and lean cows ate up the seven handsome and fat cows.

Pharaoh wakes, but immediately falls asleep to dream again:

Behold, seven ears of grain came up on one stalk, plump and good. And, behold, seven ears, thin and blasted by the east wind, sprang up after them.

And the seven thin ears devoured the seven plump and full ears.

Commentary

AND IT CAME TO PASS...(GENESIS 41:1)

The three Torah sections (*Vayeishev*, *Mikeitz* and *Vayigash*) that relate the story of Joseph and his brothers... are always read before, during or immediately after the festival of Chanukah.

Since "to everything is its season, and a time for every purpose" (Ecclesiastes 3:1), certainly the arrangement of the festivals of the year, which are the "appointed times of G-d" (Leviticus 23:4), as well as the festivals and fasts instituted by the Sages, all have a special connection to the Torah readings in whose weeks they fall, since everything is masterminded by G-d. Thus the story of Joseph is destined to be repeated with the royal Hashmona'i family in the Greek era...

(Shaloh)

AND IT CAME TO PASS AT THE END OF TWO YEARS (41:1)

Every affliction to befall man has a set time to end; as it is written, "An end He set to darkness, and every limit He investigates" (Job 28:3). This is said regarding Joseph, who was ten years in prison [when he asked the chief butler to intercede for him] but G-d investigated and saw that it is necessary for him to be imprisoned for another two years...

"In every sorrow there is profit" (Proverbs 14:23). This, too, is said in regard to Joseph, who suffered in prison and then profited from it [in becoming] ruler over Egypt...

(Midrash Tanchuma)

AND PHARAOH WAS DREAMING (41:1)

Should it not say, "and Pharaoh dreamed"? But this is to teach us that for those two years Pharaoh would see this dream each and every night, but would not remember it, until the time came for Joseph to come out of

prison; that morning, he woke up and remembered it.

(Midrash HaGadol)

BEHOLD, HE STOOD OVER THE RIVER (41:1)

The wicked see themselves as standing over their gods, as it says, "And Pharaoh dreamed; and, behold, he stood over the river" (the Nile being the arch idol of Egypt). But as for the righteous, their G-d stands over them, as it says (regarding Jacob's dream), "Behold, G-d stood over him (Genesis 28:13)

(Midrash Rabbah)

THE RIVER (41:1)

I.e., the Nile. The verse refers to it as the *yeor* (lit., "the canal"), because the whole country was full of artificially constructed canals which the Nile flows filled with water, since rain does not regularly fall in Egypt.

(Rashi)

Pharaoh saw the cows and sheaves coming out of the River, for sustenance comes to Egypt only from the Nile, and famine, too, comes only from the Nile.

(Midrash Rabbah)

AND HE SENT AND CALLED FOR ALL THE MAGICIANS OF EGYPT, AND ALL HER WISE MEN... BUT THERE WAS NONE THAT COULD INTERPRET THEM TO PHARAOH (41:8)

There were indeed interpreters of the dreams, but "none that could interpret them to Pharaoh"—their interpretations were unacceptable to him. They said: the seven good cows mean that you will beget seven daughters; the seven ill-favored cows, that you will bury seven daughters; the seven full ears of grain, that you will conquer seven provinces; the seven thin ears, that

The seven good cows are seven years; and the seven good ears are seven years; the dream is one.

And the seven thin and ill-favored cows that came up after them are seven years; and the seven empty ears blasted with the east wind shall be seven years of famine...

Behold, there come seven years of great plenty throughout all the land of Egypt. And there shall arise after them seven years of famine; and all the plenty shall be forgotten in the land of Egypt...

As for the repetition of the dream to Pharaoh twice: it is because the thing is fast determined by G-d, and G-d will shortly bring it to pass.

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None of Pharaoh's soothsayers can offer a satisfactory interpretation, until the Chief Butler remembers the young Hebrew slave who so accurately interpreted his and the Chief Baker's dreams. So Joseph is summoned from the dungeon to the palace.

The Rise of Joseph

"I have heard say of you," says Pharaoh, "that you can understand a dream to interpret it." "It is not me," says Joseph. "G-d shall give Pharaoh a favorable answer."

Pharaoh relates his dreams, and Joseph offers the following interpretation:

The dream of Pharaoh is one; G-d has declared to Pharaoh what He is about to do.

Joseph proceeds to advise Pharaoh on how to prepare for the coming events. Pharaoh should "seek out a man, understanding and wise, and appoint him over the land of Egypt"; this viceroy should oversee the collection and storage of the surplus food that will be produced in the seven years of plenty, for use during the years of famine.

"Since G-d has shown you all this," says Pharaoh to Joseph, "there is none as understanding and wise as you. You shall be over my house, and according to your word shall all my people be ruled; only in the throne will I be greater than you."

Commentary

seven provinces will revolt against you..

(Midrash Rabbah)

THEN SPOKE THE CHIEF BUTLER TO PHARAOH... "THERE WAS THERE WITH US A LAD, A HEBREW, A SLAVE... AND HE INTERPRETED TO US OUR DREAMS" (41:9-12)

Accursed are the wicked, for they never do a kindness thoroughly. In mentioning Joseph, the Chief Butler speaks of him in disparaging language: "a lad"—unwise and unfitted for a high position; "a Hebrew," who does not even know our language; "a slave," and it is written in the bylaws of Egypt that a slave may neither become a ruler nor dress in princely robes..

(Rashi)

AND IT CAME TO PASS, AS HE INTERPRETED TO US, SO IT WAS: I WAS RESTORED TO MY OFFICE, AND HE WAS HANGED (41:13)

Said Rabbi Banaah: There were twenty-four interpreters of dreams in Jerusalem. Once I dreamt a dream and I went around to all of them and they all gave different interpretations, and all were fulfilled, thus confirming that which is said, "All dreams follow the mouth."

Said Rabbi Eleazar: Whence do we know that all dreams follow the mouth? Because it says, "And it came to pass, as he interpreted to us, so it was." Raba said: This is only if the interpretation corresponds to the content of the dream: for it says, "To each man according to his dream he did interpret."

(Talmud, Berachot 55b)

A woman came to Rabbi Eliezer and said to him: "I saw in a dream that the loft of the upper story of my house was split open." "You will conceive a son," he told her. She went away and it happened so. Again she dreamed the same and came and told it to Rabbi Eliezer, who gave her the same interpretation, and it happened so. She dreamed this a third time and repaired to him but did not find him, so she told her dream to his disciples. "You will bury your husband," they told her, and this did happen. Rabbi Eliezer, hearing a cry of wailing, asked what was amiss, whereupon they related to him what had occurred. "You have killed the man," he upbraided them. "Is it not written, 'And it came to pass, as he interpreted to us, so it was'?"

Rabbi Yochanan said: All dreams are dependent on the interpretation given to them, save a dream about wine. Sometimes a dream of drinking wine bodes well, and sometimes it spells misfortune. When a scholar drinks, it is a good sign; when an ignoramus drinks, it spells misfortune.

(Midrash Rabbah)

AND PHARAOH SAID TO JOSEPH: "IN MY DREAM, I AM STANDING ON THE BANK OF THE RIVER. AND, BEHOLD, THERE COME OUT OF THE RIVER SEVEN COWS..." (41:17-18)

In contrast, Joseph saw in *his* dream (recounted in the beginning of the previous Parshah) that, "We were binding sheaves in the field..."

Both Pharaoh and Joseph behold the future in their dreams, but with a significant difference. To Pharaoh life is a river, with himself standing on the riverbank-outside of its flow, a passive bystander to what transpires. To Joseph life is a field within which he toils, laboring at "binding sheaves"—gathering its diverse stalks and binding them into an integral whole..

Many are seduced by the enticements of Pharaonic life. "We remember the

bread... And all countries came to Egypt to Joseph to buy grain; because the famine was so severe in all the earth."

The Brothers in Egypt

The Land of Canaan, too, is afflicted by famine. Jacob, hearing that food is to be had in Egypt, sends his ten older sons there to purchase grain. "But Benjamin, Joseph's brother, Jacob sent not with his brethren; for he said, 'Lest misfortune befall him.'"

The brothers arrive in Egypt and come before Joseph; "and they bowed themselves down before him with their faces to the ground." Joseph remembers his dreams.

Joseph recognized his brothers, but they did not recognize him...

And he made himself strange to them, and spoke harshly to them; and he said to them, "Where do you come from?"

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Pharaoh gives Joseph a new name-*Tzaphnath Paaneach* ("Decipherer of Secrets")-and a wife, *Asenat*, who bears him two sons: Menasseh ("Forgetting"), so named "because G-d has made me forget all my toil, and all my father's house"; and Ephraim ("Fruitfulness"), "because G-d has made me fruitful in the land of my affliction."

Joseph oversees the implementation of his plan, so that when the years of famine commence, "there was hunger in all the lands [of the region]; but in all the land of Egypt there was

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fish that we ate in Egypt for free," the children of Israel grumbled (Numbers 11:5) when G-d had stripped them of the shackles and security of slavery. Life is a free lunch in Pharaoh's Egypt; there are no choices in your life, but neither is there the anxiety and responsibility they entail. You simply stand on the riverbank and watch the cows and years follow and consume one another.

Pharaoh's vision may be every vegetable's utopia, but there is little satisfaction and no fulfillment in his free fish. It is only in the toilsome labor in the field of life that the most important freedom of all is to be found: the freedom to achieve and create.

(from the teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe)

AND ALL THE PLENTY SHALL BE FORGOTTEN IN THE LAND OF EGYPT... (41:30)

This is the interpretation of the fact that, in the dream, the lean cows (and ears) swallowed up the fat.

(Rashi)

AND PHARAOH SAID TO JOSEPH...THERE IS NONE AS UNDERSTANDING AND WISE AS YOU (41:39)

"Understanding" (*navon*) is one who can deduce one thing from another; "wise" (*chacham*) is one who possesses wisdom. A *navon* who is not a *chacham* is like a mighty warrior who is unarmed; a *chacham* who is not a *navon* is like a weakling with armaments; a *navon* and *chacham* is a strong and armed warrior.

(Midrash)

[PHARAOH] MADE HIM TO RIDE IN THE SECOND CHARIOT WHICH HE HAD...

AND JOSEPH... PASSED THROUGH ALL THE LAND OF EGYPT (41:43-45)

What is the meaning of the verse (Genesis 49:22), said in regard to Joseph, "The daughters strode upon the ramparts"? As Joseph rode in the chariot across the land of Egypt, the daughters of Egypt were walking atop the walls and throwing golden rings to him, hoping that he would look at their beauty...

(Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer)

AND HE GAVE HIM TO WIFE ASENAT THE DAUGHTER OF POTI-PHERA (41:45)

Most commentaries identify Poti-Phera with Potiphar, Joseph's former master.

According to a Midrashic account cited by a number of the commentaries, Asenat was the daughter of Dinah from Shechem. Banished from Jacob's house, Asenat wandered to Egypt and was raised by Potiphar and his wife. When the daughters of Egypt threw their jewelry at Joseph (see above), Asenat threw a golden amulet which identified her as a granddaughter of Jacob, and Joseph took her as his wife.

AND [JOSEPH] COLLECTED THE FOOD... THE PRODUCE OF EACH CITY'S SURROUNDING FIELDS HE PLACED WITHIN IT (41:48)

Each part of the land preserves its own produce; one mixes from the local dust into the grain and this keeps it from spoiling.

(Rashi's commentary)

Also the produce of man requires some "local dust" as a preservative, lest it rot.

The greater a person's achievements, the more susceptible they are to corruption. A fruitful yield in life—material or spiritual—may breed an arrogance that corrodes all that is good and G-dly in it. The solution is a dose of dust. One who saturates his successes with humility and self-effacement,

the youngest is this day with our father, and one is no more."

Joseph challenges them to prove the truth of their words. "By the life of Pharaoh," he swears, "you shall not go out of here unless your youngest brother comes here. Send one of you, and let him fetch your brother, and you shall be kept in prison, that your words may be proved..."

He throws them all into prison, but three days later he releases all except for Shimon, to be detained until they bring Benjamin to Egypt.

Remorse

"But we are guilty," say Joseph's brothers to each other, when faced with this new, unexpected trouble, "concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul, when he pleaded to us, and we would not hear; therefore this distress has come upon us."

When the famine in Egypt became severe, the Egyptians went to Joseph, crying, "Give us bread." "Woe to me that I must feed the uncircumcised," he exclaimed; "Go and circumcise yourselves," he said to them.

So they went to Pharaoh and cried out before him. "Go to Joseph," he bade them. "We have gone to him," they answered, "and he commands us to circumcise ourselves. Did we not tell you originally that he is a Hebrew and it is not fitting for a Hebrew to wield authority over us?"

"Fools," said Pharaoh, "did not a herald continually proclaim before him during the seven years of plenty, 'A famine is coming, a famine is coming!' Why then did you not keep in reserve the produce of a year or two?"

Bursting into tears they replied, "Even the grain which we have left at home has rotted." "Has no flour been left from yesterday and the day before?" he asked. "Even the bread in our baskets has gone moldy," they told him.

"Fools," he answered. "If the grain rots at his decree, what if he decrees against us and we die! Go rather to him, and even if he tells you to cut off something of your flesh, obey him and do all that he bids you."

(Midrash Rabbah; Rashi)

JACOB SAW THAT THERE WAS GRAIN IN EGYPT. AND JACOB SAID TO HIS SONS: "WHY SHOULD YOU DISPLAY YOURSELVES?" (42:1)

I.e., why should you give the impression to the children of Ishmael and the children of Esau that you are sated? For at that time they still had food.

(Rashi)

Our Rabbis have taught: If one journeys from a place where they're not fasting to a place where they are fasting, he should fast with them... If he forgot and ate and drank, he should not make it public, nor may he indulge in delicacies, as it is written: "And Jacob said to his sons: 'Why should you display yourselves?'"

(Talmud, Taanit 10b)

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And they said: "From the land of Canaan to buy food..."

And he said to them: "You are spies; to see the nakedness of the land you have come."

And they said to him: "No, my lord, but to buy food have your servants come... Your servants are twelve brothers, the sons of one man in the land of Canaan; and, behold,

Commentary

guarantees their preservation as positive and constructive forces in his own life and the lives of his fellows.

(from the teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe)

AND TO JOSEPH WERE BORN TWO SONS... (41:50)

In *galut* (exile), a person is deprived of his "home"—of the environment that preserves his faith, nourishes his growth and spurs his achievements. But precisely because it deprives him of the support of his natural environment, the state of *galut* compels the person to turn to the inner reaches of his soul and extract from there reserves of commitment and determination never tapped in more tranquil times.

This is one positive function of *galut*. In addition, exile broadens a person's horizons, bringing him in contact with things and circumstances he never would have encountered at home. Many of these are negative things and circumstances, contrary to the values of his homeland and tradition; but everything in G-d's world possesses a positive potential. When a person learns to resist and reject the negative aspects of these alien things, he can then redeem the "sparks of holiness" they harbor at their core by utilizing their essence toward good and G-dly ends.

Joseph in Egypt experienced these two stages in the positive exploitation of *galut*. In naming his first son Manasseh ("forgetting"), Joseph referred to his struggles in an environment intent on eradicating all memory of home and roots, and how his battle against forgetting and disconnection uncovered his deepest potentials. His second son, Ephraim, so named "because G-d has caused me to be fruitful in the land of my affliction," represents the second dividend of *galut*—the manner in which the "land of affliction" itself is exploited as a source of growth and productivity..

(from the teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe)

AND THE PEOPLE CRIED TO PHARAOH FOR BREAD; AND PHARAOH SAID TO ALL EGYPT "GO TO JOSEPH; WHAT HE SAYS TO YOU, DO" (41:55)

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To which Reuben responds: "Did I not speak to you, saying, 'Do not sin against the child,' and you would not hear? Therefore, behold, his blood is being claimed."

And they knew not that Joseph understood them; for he spoke to them by an interpreter. And [Joseph] turned himself about from them, and wept.

On the way back to Canaan, one of the brothers discovers that the money he paid for the grain he bought has been placed back in his sack; this greatly alarms the brothers, who worry what new libel is in store for them. (When they reach home, they *all* find that their money has likewise been returned)

At first Jacob refuses to let Benjamin go to Egypt. "You have bereaved me of my children," he cries. "Joseph is gone, and Shimon is gone, and you will take Benjamin away..." But when the food they purchased in Egypt runs out, Judah makes the following appeal to his father:

"Send the lad with me, and we will arise and go; that we may live, and not die, both we, and you, and also our little ones.

"I will be his guarantor, of my hand shall you claim him; if I bring him not to you and set him before you, then I shall be guilty towards you for all eternity."

Commentary

AND JOSEPH'S TEN BROTHERS WENT DOWN TO BUY GRAIN IN EGYPT (42:3)

Why are they called "Joseph's brothers" and not "Jacob's sons"? In the beginning they did not treat him with brotherly love but sold him; subsequently, however, they regretted it. Every day they would say, "Let us go and inquire about him and restore him to his father." And when Jacob bade them go down to Egypt, they all resolved to show him brotherly love [and seek to find him].

(Midrash Rabbah)

BUT BENJAMIN, JOSEPH'S BROTHER, JACOB SENT NOT WITH HIS BRETHREN; FOR HE SAID, "LEST MISFORTUNE BEFALL HIM" (42:4)

Jacob feared that Rachel's children were destined to perish on the road. He said to himself: their mother died on the road; Joseph I sent on the way, and he never returned; perhaps Benjamin would meet the same fate?

(Midrash HaChofetz)

AND THE SONS OF ISRAEL CAME TO BUY GRAIN, AMONG THOSE THAT CAME... (42:5)

Joseph knew that his brothers were coming to Egypt. What did he do? He placed guards at the ten gates of the city and ordered them to record the names of all who entered. In the evening they brought him their lists. One read, "Reuben the son of Jacob"; another, "Shimon the son of Jacob," and so on. He ordered that all the storehouses be shut down except for one, and he gave their names to the official in charge of that storehouse, instructing him: "When these men written down here come, bring them to me."

Several days passed but they did not come. He sent his men to search for them and they found them in the street of harlots. What were they doing there? They thought: "Maybe because Joseph was of handsome appearance he was set in a [harlot's] tent." They were arrested and brought to Joseph.

Joseph took his cup, struck it, and exclaimed: "You are spies."

"We are upright men," they replied.

"So why did you not all enter through one gate?"

"Our father bade us do so."

"And what business had you in the street of harlots?"

"We have lost something and were searching for it."

"I see in my cup that two of you destroyed a great city and that you sold your brother to Arabs," he told them.

They were immediately seized with trembling and exclaimed: "We are twelve."

"Where then are the other two?"

"One is dead and the other is with our father."

"Then go and bring him to me."

He took Shimon and bound him before their eyes, because it was he who had pushed him into the pit, and separated him from Levi, lest they devise a plot against him.

Said Shimon to his brothers: "So you did to Joseph, and so you wish to do to me."

"What can we do?" they replied. "Are the members of our household to die of famine?"

"Do as you wish," he told them. "Now I will see who will put me into prison."

Joseph then sent to Pharaoh with the request, "Send me seventy of your mighty men, for I have found robbers and desire to put them in chains." When he sent them, Joseph's brethren looked to see what he would do. "Throw this man into prison," Joseph ordered them. But as they approached him, Shimon cried out aloud at them; on hearing his voice they fell on their faces and their teeth were broken...

Now Manasseh was sitting before his father, and his father said to him: "You rise." Immediately Manasseh arose, gave him one blow, threw him

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Jacob reluctantly gives his assent, and advises them to take along a gift for this mysterious stranger who is causing them so much trouble. The brothers journey to Egypt with Benjamin.

In Joseph's House

In contrast to their prior experience, a most genial reception awaits them in Egypt. Joseph has left instructions that they be honored with an invitation to his home for the noonday meal; Shimon is restored to them; and they are told by the manager of Joseph's household not to worry about the money they found in their sacks—"Your money has come to me," he reassures them.

Commentary

into prison, and put him in fetters. Said Shimon: "This is a blow from our family."

(Midrash Rabbah; Tanchuma)

AND JOSEPH'S BROTHERS CAME, AND BOWED THEMSELVES DOWN BEFORE HIM... AND JOSEPH REMEMBERED THE DREAMS WHICH HE HAD DREAMED ABOUT THEM, AND HE SAID TO THEM, "YOU ARE SPIES..." (42:6-9)

Many of the commentaries raise the question: Why did not Joseph notify his father, in all these years, that he was alive? Perhaps there was no way he could have done this in the thirteen years that he was a slave and a prisoner, but certainly it was within his power, as viceroy of Egypt (a position he assumed nine years before his reunion with his father), to send a message to Canaan?

Several commentaries cite the Midrash Tanchuma, which describes an "oath and curse" (*cherem*) which the nine brothers who sold Joseph pronounced to forbid anyone to reveal their deed to their father. Needing a tenth participant to effect the *cherem* (Reuben was not present at the selling of Joseph), they made G-d a partner to their oath. And G-d collaborated with them, for the sale of Joseph was integral to His "awesome plot" to bring the Children of Israel to Egypt. (Rashi explains that this was why Isaac, who, being a prophet, knew what happened, did not reveal the truth to Jacob, reasoning, "How can I reveal it, if G-d does not wish to reveal it to him?"). Since disbanding a *cherem* requires the parties who imposed it, Joseph had to first reveal himself to his brothers and be reconciled with them.

The "Sages of the Tosafot" commentary also gives the following explanation: Joseph was afraid that if he informed his father of what happened to him, his brothers would disperse and scatter to the north and to the south out of shame before their father and fear of Joseph's vengeance; that would have spelled the end of the Jewish nation. So Joseph first had to reconcile

When Joseph arrives at the house,

he asked them of their welfare, and said: "Is your father well, the old man of whom you spoke? Is he still alive?" And they answered: "Your servant our father is well, he is still alive."

He lifted up his eyes, and saw his brother Benjamin, his mother's son. And he said: "Is this your younger brother, of whom you spoke to me? ..."

And Joseph made haste, for his affection was kindled towards his brother; and he sought where to weep. And he entered into his chamber, and wept there.

And he washed his face, and went out, and restrained himself, and said: "Set on bread."

And they set on for him by himself, and for them by themselves, and for the Egyptians who did eat with them, by themselves; because the Egyptians cannot eat bread with the Hebrews, for that is an abomination to the Egyptians.

Joseph astounds them by seating them around the table in the order of their birth and exhibiting additional knowledge about

himself with them, and convince them and his father that it was all ordained from Above.

Nachmanides writes:

Joseph had had two dreams — one in which his eleven brothers' sheaves bowed to his, and a second dream in which the sun, moon and eleven stars bowed to him. He knew that they were both ordained to be fulfilled exactly as foretold, and in the order in which the dreams appeared to him..

This explains why Joseph acted as he did. For one might wonder: since Joseph was already established in Egypt for many years, and was a high official and a minister there, why did he not send a single letter to his father to notify him and comfort him? Hebron is just a six-days' journey from Egypt! Certainly his father would have ransomed him for any sum of money. But the dreams dictated that they would bow to him—something which Joseph understood would take place in Egypt, the place where he was gaining sovereignty and power. The dreams also dictated that, at first, only his brothers will bow to him, and that only on a second occasion will his entire family, including his father and (adoptive mother) Bilhah, do so. Had Joseph notified his father, Jacob would certainly have immediately come to him—contrary to how things were ordained in his dreams..

So Joseph waited for his brothers to come to Egypt to purchase food. But when they came and bowed to him there were only ten of them, so he knew that the first dream had not yet been fulfilled. He therefore had to devise a ploy that would compel them to bring Benjamin—without revealing his identity. Only after Benjamin had come and bowed together with his other brothers could Joseph notify his father and cause the second dream to be fulfilled as well..

Also the other ploy he devised—by planting the goblet in Benjamin's sack—was not to cause them suffering, but to be certain that his brothers did not harbor any jealousy toward Benjamin because of their father's preference of him, as they had towards himself. He therefore had to test their

Canaan; would we then steal out of your lord's house silver or gold?"

"With whomever of your servants it be found," they boldly proclaim, "he shall die; and we also will be my lord's slaves."

Then they speedily took down every man his sack to the ground, and opened every man his sack.

And he searched, and began at the eldest, and ended at the youngest; and the cup was found in Benjamin's sack.

They rent their clothes, and loaded every man his ass, and returned to the city.

When Joseph confronts them with their deed, Judah says:

"What shall we say to my lord? What shall we speak, or how shall we clear ourselves? G-d has found out the iniquity of your servants. Behold, we are my lord's slaves, both we, and he also with whom the cup is found."

To which Joseph responds:

"Far be it from me that I should do such a thing. The man in whose hand the cup is found, he shall be my slave; and as for you, go up in peace to your father."

And with this test of the brothers' loyalty the section of *Mikeitz* concludes.

They could not understand how Joseph can be a man of the world, a "fortuitous achiever" in commerce and politics, and at the same time remain completely bound to G-d in his every moment and every endeavor.

(Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi)

AND HE SAID TO THEM: "YOU ARE SPIES" (42:9)

There is a Midrash that says that the brothers plotted to kill Joseph in order to prevent the birth of Jeroboam ben Nebat—one of the most sinful and destructive personalities in Jewish history (cf. I Kings ch. 10 ff.)—who was a descendent of Joseph.

So when Joseph accused them of being spies—an accusation they were innocent of, but which portended the sin of the "Spies" of which their descendents would be guilty in the time of Moses—they realized their error.....

(This also explains why Jacob would not accept Reuben as a guarantor for Benjamin's safety, only the guarantorship of Judah. If the brothers were being made to pay for the sin of the Spies, the only one who could save them was Judah, since Caleb, the spy from the tribe of Judah, did not join in the Spies' conspiracy.)

(Meloh HaOmer)

WE ARE ALL THE SONS OF ONE MAN (42:11)

A spark of prophecy was enkindled in them and they said to him, unwittingly: You and we are the sons of the same man.

(Midrash Rabbah)

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them (which he claims to divine by means of his magic goblet).

They eat and drink together, and Joseph bestows many gifts on them. In the morning they set out to return to Canaan, but not before Joseph's steward, acting on his master's instructions, plants the "magic" silver goblet in Benjamin's sack.

Soon Joseph's steward is chasing after them. "Why have you rewarded evil for good?" he accuses them. "Why, this is [the goblet] from which my lord drinks, and whereby indeed he divines. You have done evil in so doing."

And they said to him: "Why does my lord say these words? Far be it from your servants to do a thing like that. Behold, the money, which we found in our sacks' mouths, we brought again to you out of the land of

Commentary

love and devotion towards Benjamin before he could allow him to go with them.

AND JOSEPH'S BROTHERS CAME, AND BOWED THEMSELVES DOWN BEFORE HIM... AND [JOSEPH] MADE HIMSELF STRANGE TO THEM... (42:6-7)

This was the moment, foretold by Joseph's dreams, which his brothers had resisted and fought against so bitterly. Had they been aware that the person whom they were bowing to was Joseph, they would have experienced a profound sense of defeat. This is why Joseph did not immediately reveal himself—he could not bring himself to subject them to such humiliation..

(Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev)

JOSEPH RECOGNIZED HIS BROTHERS, BUT THEY DID NOT RECOGNIZE HIM (42:8)

Because when he left them they were already bearded, whilst he had not yet grown a beard.

(Rashi)

BUT THEY DID NOT RECOGNIZE HIM (42:8)

The brothers could not comprehend Joseph's manner of serving G-d. Like their fathers before them, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Joseph's brothers were shepherds—a vocation which takes a person far from the tumult and vanities of society to a life of seclusion and communion with nature. As such, they could turn their backs on the mundane affairs of man, contemplate the majesty of the Creator, and serve Him with a clear mind and tranquil heart..

PARSHAH SUMMARY & COMMENTARY

Mikeitz

Genesis 41:1-44:17

Torah Reading for Week of December 21-27, 2003

Commentary

AND HE PUT THEM ALL TOGETHER INTO CUSTODY FOR THREE DAYS (42:17)

Corresponding to the three days in which they had plotted and executed the destruction of Shechem.

They had convinced the inhabitants of Shechem to circumcise themselves in order to kill them; Joseph had done the very opposite: he compelled the Egyptians to circumcise themselves and then proceeded to sustain them and save their lives.

(Zohar)

AND [JOSEPH] TOOK SHIMON FROM THEM, AND BOUND HIM BEFORE THEIR EYES (42:24)

Only before their eyes did he bind him; but as soon as they left, he brought him out, gave him to eat and drink, and bathed and anointed him.

(Midrash Rabbah)

AND JUDAH SAID TO ISRAEL HIS FATHER: "... I SHALL BE GUILTY TOWARDS YOU FOR ALL ETERNITY" (43:8-9)

A decree of ostracism (*nidduy*), even if self-imposed, and even if made on a condition that is not fulfilled, requires absolution. From where is this derived? From Judah. For it is written, "And Judah said to Israel his father: '... If I bring him not to you, and set him before you, then I shall be guilty towards you for all eternity.'" Because of these words, all through the forty years that Israel remained in the wilderness Judah's bones were jolted about in their coffin, until Moses stood up and supplicated for mercy on his behalf (despite the fact that Judah did bring back Benjamin alive and well).

(Talmud, Makot 11b)

[AND JOSEPH] SAID TO THE OVERSEER OF HIS HOUSE: "BRING THESE MEN HOME, AND SLAUGHTER A BEAST, AND MAKE IT READY; FOR THE MEN SHALL DINE WITH ME AT NOON" (43:16)

"Slaughter a beast"-uncover for them the neck (to show them that it has been properly slaughtered); "and make it ready"-remove the sciatic nerve in their presence.

(Talmud, Chulin 91a)

"YOUR MONEY HAS COME TO ME" (43:23)

This seems to be other than the truth, since Joseph had, in fact, returned the money to them?

The Midrash says that the reason why the famine was ordained, causing all the wealth of the world to flow to Egypt, was to bring about the fulfillment of the Divine promise to Abraham (Genesis 15:14), "And afterwards they (the children of Israel) will go out (from Egypt) with great wealth."

Hence Joseph ordered the money returned to them: why take money from them, if the money is being collected for them?

This is the true meaning of the statement, "Your money has come to me"-the money coming to me from all over the world is, in truth, your money.

(Rabbi Menachem of Amshinov)

"IS YOUR FATHER WELL, THE OLD MAN OF WHOM YOU SPOKE? IS HE STILL ALIVE?" (43:27-28)

Rabbi Chiyya the Elder (who had moved from Babylonia to the Holy Land) met a Babylonian and asked him, "How is my father?" Replied he, "Your mother has inquired about you." (Thus he gently intimated that Rabbi Chiyya's father was dead.)

By the same token, when Joseph asked, "Is your father well?" he was inquiring after Jacob; "The old man of whom you spoke?" was a reference to Isaac. To which they replied: "Your servant our father is well, he is still alive." (Isaac had died ten years earlier, a year before Joseph was released from prison).

(Midrash Rabbah)

AND HE ENTERED INTO HIS CHAMBER, AND WEPT THERE (43:30)

He wept also after Isaac, whom he did not pay his final kindness.

(Midrash HaChafetz)

THE EGYPTIANS CANNOT EAT BREAD WITH THE HEBREWS, FOR THAT IS AN ABOMINATION TO THE EGYPTIANS (43:32)

Because the Hebrews eat the animal (the sheep) which is worshipped by the Egyptians.

(Onkelus)

AND THEY SAT BEFORE HIM, THE FIRSTBORN ACCORDING TO HIS BIRTHRIGHT, AND THE YOUNGEST ACCORDING TO HIS YOUTH; AND THE MEN MARVELED ONE AT ANOTHER (43:33)

When they came to recline [at the meal] he took the cup, struck it, and declared: "Reuben, Shimon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun are the sons of one mother. Where are they? Bring them and let them sit together. Dan and Naftali are the sons of one mother; bring them and let them sit together. Gad and Asher are the sons of one mother; bring them and let them sit together." Thus Benjamin was left. Said he: "He is motherless and I am motherless, so he and I will sit together."

(Midrash Rabbah; Rashi)

AND BENJAMIN'S PORTION WAS FIVE TIMES AS MUCH AS ANY OF THEIRS. AND THEY DRANK AND BECAME INTOXICATED WITH HIM (43:34)

From the day that Joseph departed from his brothers he did not taste wine, and they too did not taste wine, until this occasion.

PARSHAH SUMMARY & COMMENTARY

Mikeitz

Genesis 41:1-44:17

Torah Reading for Week of December 21-27, 2003

(Talmud, Shabbat 139a)

Why did the brothers, who had no way of knowing that they were united with their lost brother, drink?

But when they saw that they had no feelings of envy toward Benjamin, who had received preferential treatment from Joseph, they understood that they had overcome the root cause of Joseph's sale and had fully repented their sin.

(Kav Chen)

AND HE COMMANDED THE STEWARD OF HIS HOUSE, SAYING: "... PUT MY CUP, THE SILVER CUP, IN THE MOUTH OF THE SACK OF THE YOUNGEST" (44:1-2)

Joseph wished to test his brother's love for Benjamin his brother, to see if they would be ready to sacrifice themselves for his sake.

(Midrash)

AS SOON AS THE MORNING WAS LIGHT, THE MEN WERE SENT AWAY... (44:3)

A person should always leave the city by *ki tov* ("because it is good"-a reference to the light of day) and enter it by *ki tov*; as it is written: "As soon as the morning was light, the men were sent away."

(Talmud, Taanit 10b)

There was once a certain innkeeper in the South who used to arise in the night, put on his clothes and say to his guests, "Arise and go out, for a caravan is passing." They would go out, whereupon a robber band would fall upon and kill them, and then enter the inn and share the spoil with him.

On one occasion Rabbi Meir came there and was received as a guest. [The host] arose, dressed, and said to him, "Arise and go out, as a caravan is passing." "I have a brother for whom I must remain here and wait," he answered. "Where is he?" he asked. "In the Synagogue." "Tell me his name, and I will go and call him," he urged. "His name is Ki Tov," he replied. The innkeeper went and spent the whole of the night calling out "Ki Tov!" at the door of the Synagogue, but none responded. In the morning Rabbi Meir arose, put his baggage on his ass and was about to go, when the innkeeper asked him, "Where is your brother? "Behold, here it is," he told him, "for it is written (Genesis 1:4), 'And God saw the light *ki tov* ("that it was good").'"

(Midrash Rabbah)

"BEHOLD, THE MONEY, WHICH WE FOUND IN OUR SACKS' MOUTHS, WE BROUGHT AGAIN TO YOU OUT OF THE LAND OF CANAAN; WOULD WE THEN STEAL OUT OF YOUR LORD'S HOUSE SILVER OR GOLD?" (44:8)

This is one of the ten instances of *kal vachomer* (a priori) arguments to be found in the Torah.

(Rashi)

AND THE CUP WAS FOUND IN BENJAMIN'S SACK (44:12)

When it was thus found they exclaimed to him: "What! You are the thief and the son of a thief! (i.e., Rachel, who stole Laban's idols)" To which he retorted: "Have we a he-goat here? Have we here brothers who sold their brother!"

AND JUDAH SAID: "...WHAT SHALL WE SPEAK, OR HOW SHALL WE CLEAR OURSELVES? G-D HAS FOUND OUT THE INEQUITY OF YOUR SERVANTS" (44:16)

We know that we have not sinned in this matter, but this has been brought about by G-d; our Creditor has found from where to exact His debt.

(Rashi)

FROM THE CHASSIDIC MASTERS

THE COSMIC FANTASY

A significant part of our Parshah is taken up with a pair of dreams dreamt by the king of Egypt. These dreams are actually recounted not once, but three times: first we read an account of the dreams themselves; then comes a more detailed version, as we hear them described by Pharaoh to Joseph; and then comes Joseph's reply to Pharaoh, in which he offers his interpretation of the dreams' various components.

And these are but the last in a sequence of dreams detailed by the Torah in the preceding chapters. Joseph is in Pharaoh's palace interpreting his dreams because of another set of dreams, dreamt two years earlier in an Egyptian prison. Back then, Joseph was incarcerated together with two of Pharaoh's ministers, each of whom had a dream which Joseph successfully interpreted.

And why was Joseph in that Egyptian prison in the first place? Because eleven years before that, his repeated retelling of his own two dreams had intensified his brothers' envy of him, provoking them to sell him into slavery. Indeed, Joseph carries every detail of his two dreams with him wherever he goes, and they serve as the basis for his seemingly strange treatment of his brothers and father many years later, when he is ruler of Egypt and his brothers come from famine-stricken Canaan to purchase food (see [Nachmanides commentary on Genesis 42:9](#)).

The result of all this dreaming was the Egyptian *galut* (exile)—the first *galut* experienced by the Jewish people and the source of all their subsequent exiles. The Children of Israel settled in Egypt, where they were later enslaved by the Egyptians, and where they deteriorated spiritually to the extent that, in many respects, they came to resemble their enslavers. When G-d came to redeem them, He had to "take a nation from the innards of a nation," entering into the bowels of Egypt to extract His chosen people from the most depraved society on earth.

In the 3,300 years since, we have undergone many more centuries of *galut*, as we came under the hegemony of Babylonians and Persians, Greeks and Romans, Christians and Communists. We are still in *galut* today. We may be free, on the whole, of the persecutions and hardships we experienced in earlier generations, but the Jew is still a stranger in the world, still deprived of the environment that nurtures his soul and feeds his aspirations. And *galut* in all its guises, our sages tell us, is the outgrowth of our first *galut* in Egypt. Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi explains that *galut* was born out of a succession of dreams because *galut* is the ultimate dream. A dream is perception without the discipline of reason. Here

are all the stimuli and experiences we know from real life—sights and sounds, thoughts and action, exhilaration and dread. Indeed, everything in a dream is borrowed from our waking lives. But everything is topsy-turvy, defying all norms of logic and credulity. In a dream, a tragedy might be a cause for celebration, a parent might be younger than his child, and a cow may jump over the moon.

Galut is a dream—a terrible, irrational fantasy embracing the globe and spanning millennia. A dream in which crime pays, the good die young, and G-d's chosen people are slaughtered with impunity. A dream in which what is right and true is seldom "realistic," and nonentities such as "ignorance," "death" and "evil" are potent forces in our lives. The surreality of *galut* pervades our spiritual lives as well. Only in *galut* can a person arise in the morning, purify himself in a *mikvah*, pray with ecstasy and devotion, study a chapter of Torah, and then proceed to the office for a business day of connivance and deceit. "Hypocrisy" is not an adequate description of this phenomenon—in many cases, his prayer is sincere, and his love and awe of G-d quite real. But he inhabits the dream-world of *galut*, where antitheses coexist and inconsistencies are the norm.

In the real world, such absurdities were impossible. When the Holy Temple stood in Jerusalem and bathed the world in Divine daylight, no man with a residue of spiritual impurity (*tum'ah*) could approach G-d until he had undergone a process of purification. That G-d is the source of life and that sin (i.e., disconnection from the Divine) is synonymous with death was no mere conceptual truth, but a fact of life. In the real world that was, and to which we will awake when the dream of *galut* will evaporate, the spiritual laws of reality are as apparent and as immutable as—indeed more apparent and immutable than—the physical laws of nature.

However, says the Lubavitcher Rebbe, there is also a positive side to our present-day hallucinatory existence. In the real world, a true relationship with G-d can come only in the context of a life consistently faithful to Him; in the dreamworld of *galut*, the imperfect individual can experience the Divine. In the real world, only the impeccable soul can enter into the Sanctuary of G-d; in the dreamworld of *galut*, G-d "resides amongst them, in the midst of their impurity."

We daily await the Divine dawn that will dispel the cosmic fantasy which, for much of our history, has crippled us physically and spiritually. But in the moments remaining to the dream of *galut*, let us avail ourselves of the unique opportunity to be "inconsistent" and "hypocritical" in the positive sense: by overreaching our spiritual capacity, by being and doing more than we are able by any rational measure of our merit and potential.