

Kol Rina
An Independent Minyan
Parashat Mikeitz

December 19, 2020 *** 4 Tevet, 5781

Kol Rina – An Independent Minyan, is a traditional egalitarian community. We are haimish (homey/folksy), friendly, participatory, warm and welcoming. We hold weekly services in South Orange as well as holiday services and celebrations which are completely lay led. We *welcome* all to our services and programs from non-Hebrew readers to Jewish communal and education professionals.

Miketz in a Nutshell

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/3213/jewish/Mikeitz-in-a-Nutshell.htm

Joseph's imprisonment finally ends when Pharaoh dreams of seven fat cows that are swallowed up by seven lean cows, and of seven fat ears of grain swallowed by seven lean ears. Joseph interprets the dreams to mean that seven years of plenty will be followed by seven years of hunger, and advises Pharaoh to store grain during the plentiful years. Pharaoh appoints Joseph governor of Egypt. Joseph marries Asenath, daughter of Potiphar, and they have two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim.

Famine spreads throughout the region, and food can be obtained only in Egypt. Ten of Joseph's brothers come to Egypt to purchase grain; the youngest, Benjamin, stays home, for Jacob fears for his safety. Joseph recognizes his brothers, but they do not recognize him; he accuses them of being spies, insists that they bring Benjamin to prove that they are who they say they are, and imprisons Simeon as a hostage. Later, they discover that the money they paid for their provisions has been mysteriously returned to them.

Jacob agrees to send Benjamin only after Judah assumes personal and eternal responsibility for him. This time Joseph receives them kindly, releases Simeon, and invites them to an eventful dinner at his home. But then he plants his silver goblet, purportedly imbued with magic powers, in Benjamin's sack. When the brothers set out for home the next morning, they are pursued, searched, and arrested when the goblet is discovered. Joseph offers to set them free and retain only Benjamin as his slave.

Haftarah in a Nutshell: I Kings 3:15-4:1.

This week's *haftarah* opens with the words "And Solomon awoke, and behold it was a dream," echoing this week's Torah portion which opens with Pharaoh's dreams.

Though not included in the *haftarah*, in this dream G-d granted King Solomon his legendary wisdom. The *haftarah* relates a famous episode that made all of Israel aware of their new monarch's keen intellect.

Two harlots approach King Solomon to adjudicate their dispute. They lived together in the same house, and each had given birth to an infant three days apart. One night, one of the infants was accidentally crushed to death by her mother, and one woman accused the other of switching infants in order to have a live baby. Each woman claimed that the live child is theirs and the deceased child was the other's. King Solomon asks that a sword be brought and orders that the child be cut in half with each woman receiving one half. At this point, the mother of the living child exhorts the king to give the child to the other woman so that he may live, while the other woman

says, "Let it be neither mine nor yours, divide!" The king ruled: "Give her the living child, and by no means slay him: she is his mother!"

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Three Approaches to Dreams: Mikketz 5781 by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks z"l

<https://rabbisacks.org/mikketz-5781/>

In one of the greatest transformations in all literature, Joseph moves in a single bound from prisoner to Prime Minister. What was it about Joseph – a complete outsider to Egyptian culture, a “Hebrew,” a man who had been languishing in jail on a false charge of attempted rape – that marked him out as a leader of the greatest empire of the ancient world?

Joseph had three gifts that many have in isolation but few in combination. The first is that he dreamed dreams. Initially we do not know whether his two adolescent dreams – of his brothers’ sheaves bowing down to his, and of the sun, moon and eleven stars bowing down to him – are a genuine presentiment of future greatness, or merely the overactive imagination of a spoiled child with delusions of grandeur.

Only in this week’s parsha of Mikketz do we discover a vital piece of information that has been withheld from us until now. Joseph says to Pharaoh, who has also had two dreams: “The reason the dream was given to Pharaoh in two forms is that the matter has been firmly decided by God, and God will do it soon” (Gen. 41:32). Only in retrospect do we realise that Joseph’s double dream was a sign that this, too, was no mere imagining. Joseph really was destined to be a leader to whom his family would bow down.

Second, like Sigmund Freud many centuries years later, Joseph had a gift for interpreting the dreams of others. He did so for the butler and baker in prison and, in this week’s parsha, for Pharaoh. His interpretations were neither magical nor miraculous. In the case of the butler and baker he remembered that in three days’ time it would be Pharaoh’s birthday (Gen. 40:20). It was the custom of rulers to make a feast on their birthday and decide the fate of certain individuals. (In Britain, the Queen’s birthday honours continue this tradition.) It was reasonable therefore to assume that the butler’s and baker’s dreams related to this event and their unconscious hopes and fears.[1]

In the case of Pharaoh’s dreams, Joseph may have known ancient Egyptian traditions about seven-year famines. Nahum Sarna quotes an Egyptian text from the reign of King Djoser (ca. twenty-eighth century BCE):

I was in distress on the Great Throne, and those who are in the palace were in heart’s affliction from a very great evil, since the Nile had not come in my time for a space of seven years. Grain was scant, fruits were dried up, and everything which they eat was short.[2]

Joseph's most impressive achievement, though, was his third gift, the ability to implement dreams, solving the problem of which they were an early warning. No sooner had he told of a seven-year famine than he continued, without pause, to provide a solution:

“Now let Pharaoh look for a discerning and wise man and put him in charge of the land of Egypt. Let Pharaoh appoint commissioners over the land to take a fifth of the harvest of Egypt during the seven years of abundance. They should collect all the food of these good years that are coming and store up the grain under the authority of Pharaoh, to be kept in the cities for food. This food should be held in reserve for the country, to be used during the seven years of famine that will come upon Egypt, so that the country may not be ruined by the famine.” (Gen. 41:33-36)

We have seen Joseph the brilliant administrator before, both in Potiphar's house and in the prison. It was this gift, demonstrated at precisely the right time, that led to his appointment as Viceroy of Egypt.

From Joseph, therefore, we learn three principles. The first is: dream dreams. Never be afraid to let your imagination soar. When people come to me for advice about leadership, I tell them to give themselves the time and space and imagination to dream. In dreams we discover our passion, and following our passion is the best way to live a rewarding life.[3]

Dreaming is often thought to be impractical. Not so; it is one of the most practical things we can do. There are people who spend months planning a holiday but do not give even a day to planning their life. They let themselves be carried by the winds of chance and circumstance. That is a mistake. The Sages said, “Wherever [in the Torah] we find the word *vayehi*, ‘And it came to pass,’ it is always the prelude to tragedy.”[4] A *vayehi* life is one in which we passively let things happen. A *yehi* (“Let there be”) life is one in which we make things happen, and it is our dreams that give us direction.

Theodor Herzl, to whom more than any other person we owe the existence of the State of Israel, used to say, “If you will it, it is no dream.” I once heard a wonderful story from Eli Wiesel. There was a time when Sigmund Freud and Theodor Herzl lived in the same district of Vienna. “Fortunately,” he said, “they never met. Can you imagine what would have happened had they met? Herzl would have said: ‘I have a dream of a Jewish state.’ Freud would have replied: ‘Tell me, Herr Herzl, how long have you been having this dream? Lie down on my couch, and I will psychoanalyse you.’ Herzl would have been cured of his dreams and today there would be no Jewish state.” Thankfully, the Jewish people have never been cured of their dreams.

The second principle is that leaders interpret other people's dreams. They articulate the inchoate. They find a way of expressing the hopes and fears of a generation. Martin Luther King Jr.'s “I have a dream” speech was about taking the hopes of Black Americans and giving them wings. It was not Joseph's dreams that made him a leader;

it was Pharaoh's. Our own dreams give us direction; it is other people's dreams that give us opportunity.

The third principle is: find a way to implement dreams. First see the problem, then find a way of solving it. The Kotzker Rebbe once drew attention to a difficulty in Rashi's writing. Rashi (Ex. 18:1) says that Yitro was given the name Yeter (meaning, "he added") because "he added a passage to the Torah beginning [with the words], "Choose from among the people ..." (Ex. 18:21). This occurred when Yitro saw Moses leading alone and told him that what he was doing was not good: he would wear himself and the people to exhaustion. Therefore he should choose good people and delegate much of the burden of leadership to them.

The Kotzker pointed out that the passage that Yitro added to the Torah did not actually begin, "Choose from among the people." It began several verses earlier when he said, "What you are doing is not good." (Ex. 18:17) The answer the Kotzker gave was simple. Saying "What you are doing is not good" is not an addition to the Torah – it is merely stating a problem. The addition consisted in the solution: delegating. Good leaders either are, or surround themselves with, problem-solvers. It is easy to see when things are going wrong. What makes a leader is the ability to find a way of putting them right. Joseph's genius lay not in predicting seven years of plenty followed by seven years of famine, but in devising a system of storage that would ensure food supplies in the lean and hungry years.

Dream dreams; understand and articulate the dreams of others; and find ways of turning a dream into a reality – these three gifts are leadership, the Joseph way.

[1] Ibn Ezra 40:12 and Bechor Shor 40:12 both make this suggestion. [2] Nahum

Sarna, Understanding Genesis, New York, Schocken, 1966, 219. [3] One of the classic texts on this subject is Ken Robinson, The Element: How Finding Your Passion Changes Everything (New York: Penguin Books, 2009).

[4] Megillah 10b.

Strangers To Ourselves: Miketz by Jan Uhrback

<http://www.jtsa.edu/strangers-to-ourselves>

The Joseph narrative contains a striking number of contranymy—words that simultaneously convey opposite meanings. Why?

Contranymy are a natural linguistic expression of the Torah's insistence that a "both/and" perspective is essential to understanding deep truths, other people, and ourselves. The portrayal of Joseph is a prime example:

Is Joseph a hero, who saves everyone from famine? Or is he an authoritarian enabler who, seduced by proximity to power and wealth, sets the stage for oppression by consolidating land, wealth, and population control under Pharaoh?

Are his machinations with his brothers a test of their remorse and repentance, calculated to lead to reconciliation? Or is he using his position to exact revenge, cruelly toying with his brothers' and father's fears?

Is he genuinely pious, or does he abuse his charismatic gifts in the service of his ego, invoking God to shore up his position, or to appear humble and disinterested?

Does he truly wield power, or has he surrendered his agency—becoming the highest-ranking slave to Pharaoh, enslaved as well to his own emotional needs?

The answer in every case is “yes.” But it’s hard to hold simultaneously such conflicting views of one person. So depending on how we’ve “read” Joseph in the past and what we expect from our biblical ancestors (do we want to admire and emulate them? do we want to critique them?), we as readers are likely to credit some aspects of the story while discounting or not even noticing other details. As with people in our lives, absent significant effort and ongoing study, we tend to construct for ourselves an artificially smooth narrative of who Joseph is, consisting of only part of the reality.

This tendency helps explain the most striking contronym in the story, the root נכר (nun-khaf-resh), which is used—within a single verse—to mean both “recognize” and “unrecognizable”: “When Joseph saw his brothers, he recognized them (*vayakirem*); but he made himself unrecognizable (*vayitnaker*) to them” (Gen. 42:7).

The term refers to actual identification, of course, but suggests much more. I “recognize” someone when I see them accurately as an independent Other, acknowledging and accepting what we share and also how we differ. To “not be recognized” is to be overlooked or seen falsely—as a partial rather than whole self, or a projection of the one seeing.

The problem of recognizing an Other is thus entangled with the problem of recognizing one’s self. If I don’t recognize my own preconceptions, biases, unconsciousness narratives, agendas, etc., how can I know if I’m truly seeing anyone else?

*“Joseph recognized (וַיִּתְנַקֵּר *vayaker*) his brothers, but they did not recognize him (lo hikruhu)” (Gen. 42:8).*

The Midrash explains that Joseph could recognize his brothers because when he left them, they were already fully mature and bearded. He however was a youth, and the greater change in his appearance made him unrecognizable now (Genesis Rabbah 91:7).

But in a stunningly insightful (and contemporary!) reading, the Or Hahayyim (Chaim Ibn Attar, 18th c. Morocco) rejects this. He explains that, usually, once *I know you* dawns on one person, the Other too senses it unconsciously and begins scrutinizing more carefully, eventually also realizing, *ah yes, I do know this person*. But the Torah specifically informs us that that didn’t happen. Why? Because seeing him in such an exalted position, says the Or Hahayyim, they had already decided what they would see in him, and “distanced this thought from their consciousness.” In other words, because the brothers’ operative narrative had Joseph in a debased, disempowered state, at the bottom of an actual pit the last time they saw him, they were unable or unwilling to recognize him raised high.

This reading comes remarkably close to what cognitive scientists call confirmation bias—the human tendency to only notice or give credence to data if it can be understood as conforming to our existing beliefs, such that our views of Self and Other tend to reinforce themselves. The brothers' confirmation bias prevented them from recognizing him. But Joseph “made himself strange” (an alternate translation of *vayitnaker*)—a good description of the conscious effort required to see past what we already believe—and so he could recognize them.

Now we can understand the profound significance of having the same word mean both “recognize” and “unrecognizable.” A simple inability to make a physical identification may be the result of too *little* familiarity. But deeper failures of recognition are often a problem of too *much* familiarity: we fail to truly see someone because we think we already know who they are. Recognition thus depends upon a kind of estrangement, allowing who and what we think we know to become a bit foreign, becoming strangers to ourselves.

It is no accident that this insight is highlighted just at this point in the story, as it begins its movement toward the dramatic reconciliation of brothers who hated and hurt one another. Stepping out of our familiar interior landscapes into a strange land of new thoughts—becoming a bit foreign to ourselves—takes effort and courage. But it is essential to moving past hatred, to seeking and granting forgiveness, to truly seeing and understanding the Other, ourselves, and our world. (*Jan Uhrbach is the Director Of The Block/Kolker Center For Spiritual Arts.*)

From Erwin Mevorah:

Miketz by Rav Fischel Schacter shilita

The rabbi began his talk this week by describing how many years ago the way of communication was that a person will mail a letter from one end of the world and eventually it will reach its destination at the other end of the world . Today we think we are so sophisticated by sending a email - with one push of a button in a split second it can reach the other side of the world . HASHEM sends us reminders that as much a we think we are in control - in a very short time our world can be upside down . HASHEM created the world and we think we own it and will be here forever . HASHEM has many ways of reminding us just how temporary this world is . Hanuka is all about praising HASHEM and recognizing that everything in life is a miracle .

The rabbi told over a story how during the the period in Russia before world war 1 - the army will randomly capture young boys and draft them into the army . There were four boys that were taken away . Three came from families that had wealth and the fourth came from a very poor family . The parents of the wealthy boys were able to bribe their way to freedom for their sons the fourth could not . The rabbi of the town heard about the situation and went into his shul and took the crown of the sefer Torah and sold it . The people told him - how could you do such a thing for this boy - nothing will come of him . He doesn't have much going for him . The rabbi was adamant - he sold the

crown and was able to release the boy . He took the boy to the shul and opened up the ark - and showed him the Torah that was missing a crown - he told the boy I sold that crown in order that you should become a crown in the eyes of HASHEM . Says the rabbi we are all like that young boy - we might not be at the level that we want to be - but we still have the ability to have a crown on our head - it depends on how we view ourselves . If we see ourselves as someone that not worth very much then the crown will not want to be placed upon that person - but if we see ourselves that maybe I'm going through a difficult period - but I am trying my best to get back to the level that I know I can achieve - I'm taking one step at a time . In hanuka we follow bet Hillel - that tells us to light one additional candle each day for eight days . When we look at the first night we say to ourselves - I'm so far away from the eight night , each day we add another candle after eight days the entire Menora becomes complete - if we have the attitude that I'm going to add each day a little more - then the crown will want to be placed on our heads .

The rabbi told another story about a shul in Cleveland . There was this man each Shabbat he would drive up to the shul wait for the Torah to be taken out of the ark and - when the Torah was opened for all to see this man would look at the letters of the holy Torah and it would be as if the letters would be pulling this man closer . After the the Torah was put on the bima - the man would get back into his car and drive off . This went on for a few weeks - some of the other congregants went over to this person and told him how on Shabbat - we are not allowed to drive in a car - from then on he walked - miles to the shul each Shabbat . A person there spoke to this man to try to find out about what brought him to this shul . It seems this man was in Israel and he happened to walk into a shul at the exact time that the Torah was being shown - he saw the letters and he was transformed . The person that was trying to help this man in Cleveland - found out that the shul that he went into in Israel - the rabbi there was originally from Cleveland and he made aliya to the holy land . When he was a rabbi in Cleveland - he wanted to purchase a sefer Torah for his shul . The committee didn't want to spend the money of the shul on the sefer Torah - they told the rabbi - you will have to fund this on your own . He went out collecting and it was very difficult . He came across this old lady for a donation and she told him she will pay for the entire sefer Torah . She had a condition - when the sefer Torah was completed she wanted a blessing for her grandson - it seems that her children didn't follow in the ways that she preferred - she wanted her grandson to have the blessing of the Torah that one day he will return . When this rabbi went to Israel he took that sefer Torah . The man in this story that saw the sefer Torah in Israel is this lady's grandson . Says the rabbi - do we realize the power of parents and grandparents . Do we know how their tears can move mountains . We have to know says the rabbi that we are the products of our parents and grandparents blood sweat and tears .

When the brothers thought that they sinned when it came to the selling of Yosef - they were very disturbed . For so many years they held that they were correct - now many

years later they are reviewing what happened and they finally admit that they were wrong . Says the rabbi what can we say about things that we did in the past - when we thought we were so correct - after looking it over we come to realize that maybe we also made mistakes in our past . Says the rabbi we can still make Teshuba - it's never too late . HASHEM is sending us many messages - he is telling us - it's time to make teshuba - we still have a chance . We have to believe that what we are going through today is a test and we are expected to pass this test with flying colors - because we have so many tears and prayers of our parents and grandparents backing us up .
Shabbat shalom

Mikketz: Family First by Rabbi Jay Kelman

<https://www.torahinmotion.org/civCRM/MAILING/VIEW?RESET=1&ID=3393>

Judaism has long maintained that a strong family life is the most important ingredient in creating and sustaining a person of character and integrity. The Torah spends an entire book detailing the family life of our founders; there is much to strive to emulate and what to strive to avoid. Their struggles demonstrate that despite life's challenges we can attain greatness. If we are fortunate, the lessons learned from our upbringing are so strong that they shape and guide us throughout our life. There is no better example of this than that of Yosef.

Yosef left home under the most tragic of circumstances - returning only to bring Yaakov's body back "home" - at the tender age of 17. Despite being sold into captivity, he so impressed his master that he was soon running the household of a prominent Egyptian officer. Most understandably, he tried to forget the painful memories of the cruel treatment he received at the hands of his brothers; he made no effort to contact his aging father, a sure sign that he had every intention of starting a fresh life in his new land. But even in his attempt to forget the past, the moral traits instilled in him at home thankfully remained a part of him. He was thus able to reject the sexual advances of his master's wife. Our Sages tell us that Yosef was willing and perhaps even eager to succumb, coming home early to do "his work". What prevented him from doing so? It was, our Sages claim, the image of his father that appeared to him at that moment. The vividness of the image, and the voice of morality that it projected, allowed Yosef to retain his place amongst the b'nei Yisrael.

Yosef did, however, have to pay the price for his moment of temptation. Falsely accused of sexual harassment, Yosef was imprisoned. Through a "lucky break", Yosef was given the opportunity to act as a "sleep therapist" for Pharaoh, an opportunity he used to full advantage. Pharaoh was so impressed by his recommendations that he immediately appointed him Viceroy and married him to Poti-Phera, a scion of a prominent family and as Rashi notes, the daughter of his former master, with whom he had two children. Yet the Torah deviates from its norm by not mentioning the birth of the children at this point; instead, it first tells us that there were seven years of plenty and that Yosef was accumulating the excess food in preparation for the eventual

downturn in the economy. Only then, in the midst of Yosef's busy schedule, are we told of the birth of his children.

The Torah is hinting at a very important message. Yes, Yosef was literally saving the world; but his greatness lay in the fact that despite his busy schedule, he found time to properly raise his children. Yosef's most impressive achievement was not that his economic policies averted a looming catastrophe. It was that he was the father of Ephraim and Menashe, the first Jewish children born and successfully raised in a foreign environment, the first Jews to have actual contact with their grandfather and the only grandchildren of Yaakov who merited inclusion as members of the twelve tribes. No matter how great the person, no matter how important his task, it is the family that must come first. It is no wonder that Jewish parents have, for thousands of years, been blessing their children, praying that they be like Ephraim and Menashe. The importance of "family first" is a difficult one for many of us as we struggle to balance our many tasks; often, we have to spend less time with our family just to make ends meet. This is especially true of people involved in crucial work that benefits society as a whole, medical professionals, communal leaders, or government officials. Working for the greater good fulfills a tremendous mitzvah, but our greatest task is assuring the proper values and role models are passed on to the next generation. Like Yosef, we must realize that, while we must do our part in world affairs, ultimately it is "not by my own power—but G-d may provide an answer" (Breisheet 41:16). We are not obligated to solve all the world's problems, but we are obligated to ensure that family comes first.

Miketz by Rabbi Shaul Rosenblatt

<https://mailchi.mp/tikun/haazinu5781-2578474?e=e0f2ca6c0d>

This week we read the classical story of Joseph and his brothers. Joseph is appointed second in command in Egypt after interpreting Pharaoh's dreams. Seven thin cows eating seven fat cows and seven thin ears of corn eating seven fat ears of corn meant seven years of plenty followed by seven years of famine. So, Joseph starts storing grain.

Once the famine arrives, Egypt has food and everyone else is starving. Joseph's brothers, along with the rest of the world, travel to Egypt for food. They don't recognise Joseph as their brother – it's been 20 years and he left them as a teenager. He gives them a merry run-around with the sole purpose of encouraging them to take responsibility for the mistake that they made – which, to their great credit, they do. There is a final confrontation between him and his brothers, however, and the portion ends with a cliff-hanger. So make sure you tune in next week!

Pharaoh was more satisfied with Joseph's interpretation of his dream than the interpretations of his magicians. But why? Surely, they came up with conceivable interpretations also? The Rabbis tell us, for example, that they suggested the dreams meant that he would have seven children and they would all die. Why is seven years of

plenty followed by seven years of famine a more plausible interpretation than that? I think it's that we human beings have intuitions that transcend logic. Sometimes we know things simply because we know them. Truth somehow resonates with us. We have a sense of danger even though there is no immediate evidence for it. We know when someone is

looking at us, even though we aren't looking at them. Pharaoh knew because he knew. But still....based on an impressive interpretation of your dreams, you make a slave, a 'convicted' rapist, into your Prime Minister who is de facto in charge of all of Egypt??? It seems a just a little rash.

I believe that our intuition is particularly attuned when it comes to human beings. There are people, for example, we trust very quickly – and people we would not trust from the moment we meet them. We are not always exactly right, and hence it's a good idea to be careful, but there is usually something in what we see. Joseph was, quite simply, a very impressive human being. It was obvious to Pharaoh that, slave or no slave, this was a man who could competently prepare Egypt for the coming famine. And how right he was.

We human beings usually prefer the security of logic. We like things that add up, like two plus two, giving us the answer of four. We like the transparency of the rational process. It makes the world black and white; and a black and white world feels so much more controllable.

But, unfortunately, our world is not as simple as that. If Pharaoh had had only logic to rely on, he would have sent this slave back to prison and, during the seven years of famine, his empire would have collapsed – utterly and irredeemably.

Logic is not only comfortable – it can also be arrogant. We can be seduced by the fact that it puts us in the driving seat. And not only can it be arrogant, in painting a black and white world, it paints a world without nuance; without subtlety; without the richness of many shades of grey – because both black and white have no shades.

As I write, I realise I have more to say, so I will finish this one next week. Suffice to say, for the moment, that we are all, even an arrogant Pharaoh, blessed with an incredible gift of judgment; we sense what's real and what makes sense. For sure, logic has a value and its role to play. But I believe that, ultimately, our intuition provides a surer and more accurate path to truth.

Everyone Owns the Words of Torah: Mikeitz by Rabbi Michael Dolgin

<https://reformjudaism.org/learning/torah-study/torah-commentary/everyone-owns-words-torah>

Learning, commenting, and reacting to our Torah's teachings are a personal experience, or at least they should be. Like all books of the Torah, our relationship with Genesis grows deeper each year when we encounter it anew. For, me one part of Genesis that especially stands out is Parashat Mikeitz.

During my first year of rabbinical studies at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion (HUC-JIR) in Jerusalem, I gave my first d'var Torah on Mikeitz, focusing on the

story of Joseph. While living in Jerusalem that year, I purchased my first copy of Mikraot Gedolot, the Torah printed with traditional commentaries, and in the winter of 1987, I sat with that sacred volume and reflected on this parashah.

Its opening words that speak of “sh’natayim yamim” – or “two years of days” – inspired me to speak about the importance of reminiscing on our days at this dark time of year and making the most of the days ahead. As I sat in my Jerusalem apartment holding this book and finding a teaching to share with my fellow students, I could never have imagined the fall and winter of 2020.

I sit now in my home in Toronto, where I have served Temple Sinai for the past 28.5 years, with the same volume containing the same commentaries written hundreds of years ago. Back then, no one could have imagined there would be a global pandemic, nor could they imagine the digital tools that connect us to one another despite it. Yes, the world has changed; even more so, I have changed.

While I do not remember which specific Torah commentary inspired me 33 years ago, this year, I am particularly drawn to the words of K’li Yakar, the commentary of Rabbi Shlomo Ephraim ben Aaron Luntschitz (1550–1619), who served as the Rabbi of Prague from 1604-1619. While I have revered R. Luntschitz as a teacher, over the years, he has also come to feel like my friend. When I need a particularly significant word of guidance, I can easily find it in his writing. His comments on this week’s parashah focus on the characteristic of humility, especially as it relates to learning.

At the end of last week’s portion, Joseph asks Pharaoh’s cupbearer to intercede for him with Egypt’s ruler and save him. Our sages, however, want to see Joseph relying on faith in God as well. Such faith is not easy to come by; it requires belief that the Holy One takes an interest in each of our lives. Naturally, many of us question such a belief. In the K’li Yakar, R. Luntschitz suggests that the Holy One should be our model. Just as God takes an interest in us, we should take an interest in everyone and listen to and respect them, regardless of their “level” of learning, education, or experience.

As it is written in the commentary on the first line of this portion:

“It is the way of the world that when a person has reached a superior level regarding a personal characteristic or strength, [they cease] to recall the individual at the lower level and do not speak that person’s name.”

Many of us have a natural tendency toward hierarchy. We come to understand our place in life by comparing ourselves to those we see as above or below us. Recognizing this inclination creates an opportunity for us to overcome it.

Another ally in personal growth is longevity. Ever since I encountered this text over three decades ago and have studied it many times since then, the message of this commentary echoes within me more loudly than ever. During those intervening years, this text also became my son’s bar mitzvah portion.

What have I learned from this journey? I have learned that I need to hear as many reactions to these ancient words as I can. I need to know what message they

communicate to teachers and students, to professors and newcomers, to biblical Hebrew scholars and those who cannot yet read the Torah's native language. I have learned that everyone owns the words of Torah; that we are truly in possession of Torah when we realize that it does not exclusively belong to us and that its multiple interpretations are not ours to measure.

This week, discuss Mikeitz's words with someone who thinks or lives differently than you do. You will be far richer for the experience.

[Dream a Little Dream, and Then Interpret It by Rabbi Dan Moskovitz](https://www.judaism.org/learning/torah-study/torah-commentary/dream-little-dream-and-then-interpret-it)

<https://www.judaism.org/learning/torah-study/torah-commentary/dream-little-dream-and-then-interpret-it>

The entire story of Joseph, which spans three parshiyot in the latter third of the Book of Genesis, centers around dreams: their interpretation and the actions that interpretation then inspires. This week, we read the second portion in that series, Mikeitz.

The dreams begin in last week's parashah, Vayeishev. In the first dream, Joseph sees himself and his brothers, each binding a sheaf of grain. Then his brothers' sheaves encircle his sheaf and bow down to it. In the second dream, the sun, the moon, and 11 stars bow down to Joseph. When he relays these dreams to his brothers, they take them as a belittling affront to their status as elders. What's the ultimate outcome of their interpretation of his dreams? When Joseph goes in search of his brothers who are out tending the flocks, they throw him into a pit and then sell him to traders traveling to Egypt (Gen. 37:6-9).

This week, in Mikeitz, the theme of dreams continues. Joseph, now a prisoner, is given a chance at freedom because of his seemingly miraculous ability to interpret the dreams of his fellow prisoners. This becomes known to Pharaoh, who has his own dreams that are keeping him awake at night.

Joseph is called before Pharaoh, who relates his dreams about seven fat cows that devour seven skinny cows, and seven healthy ears of corn that are swallowed by seven thin ears of corn. Joseph interprets them to mean that seven years of plenty will be followed by seven years of famine. We read:

"Look — seven years are coming [of] great plenty throughout all the land of Egypt. But seven years of famine are coming up after them, and all the plenty in the land of Egypt will be forgotten; the famine will consume the land." (Gen. 41:29-30)

Joseph chooses to interpret the dreams in a way that would make his own counsel invaluable to Pharaoh and insure a place of power for himself in the royal court. He advises Pharaoh to appoint a wise leader to be placed in charge of the coming crisis. Plans and provisions should be implemented to store the abundant grain in the first seven years to provide a lifeline for the people in the years of famine to follow:

"And Pharaoh said to his officials, 'Is there anyone like this to be found, a man with the spirit of God in him?' Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, 'Since God has made all this known to you, there is no one as discerning and wise as you! You shall be in charge of my household, and all my people shall obey your word; only I, The Throne, shall be greater than you.'" (Gen. 41:38-40)

In his new role, Joseph is made the second most powerful person in all of Egypt — second only to Pharaoh himself. Pharaoh places his ring on Joseph's hand, clothes him in fine robes and jewels, and parades him on a chariot beside him as they tour the Egyptian nation. Then Pharaoh gives Joseph a new name; Zaphenath-paneah meaning "He who explains hidden things." (According to Targum Onkelos, Paneah has no parallel in Scripture.)

This dream interpretation of seven years of plenty followed by seven years of famine in the entire region (biblical Israel included) ultimately leads Jacob to send Joseph's remaining brothers down to Egypt to purchase food for the family. A dramatic scene soon follows where Joseph encounters his brothers but does not reveal himself to them. He accuses them of being spies and holds one brother, Simeon, as hostage till they return with their youngest brother Benjamin.

All of this happens because of dreams.

Our modern view of dreams is influenced by the works of psychiatry pioneers such as Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung. Freud believed that dreams revealed a person's unconscious desires. Jung, who worked with Freud for a time, believed that dreams come from a person's unconscious and help regulate the psyche.

Both of these views diverge from the more mystical, spiritual approach of Torah in general, and this week's parashah in particular, which proceeds on the premise that there is some external influence (God/gods) that imparts prophetic or precognitive insights to people through the medium of sleep. As Rabbi Ismar Schorsch states:

"Nowhere does the secularization of the modern mind find more striking articulation than in the view that dreams are no longer regarded as an emanation from above but rather as an eruption from below" (Rabbi Ismar Schorsch, "The Power of Dreams," Jewish Theological Seminary, December 12, 1998).

By contrast, Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto (Ramchal), the 18th-century kabbalist whose life preceded Freud and Jung's, concurred with their scientific approach that dream content is affected by one's thoughts and emotions. Yet, he also adopts the Talmud's assertion (Babylonian Talmud, B'rachot 57b) that our dreams can have prophetic significance or relate to things that only the spirit can experience (see Derech Hashem 3:1:6). Rabbi Dr. Moshe Freedman explains:

"According to Ramchal, when we sleep, our souls can on occasion interact with external spiritual forces. These interactions enter our subconscious awareness and affect the content of our dreams. Nevertheless, even such extraordinary dream experiences are tricky to decipher." ("Do our dreams have any meaning?" The Jewish Chronicle, January 12, 2017)

Whatever the actual nature of dreams is, we are still challenged to understand them. Our Talmudic Rabbis gave important guidance on this that has resonated for thousands of years: they held that the power of a dream lies with its interpretation and not with the dream itself (Babylonian Talmud, B'rachot, 56b).

In the Talmud, we read that, "a dream not interpreted is like a letter not read" (Babylonian Talmud, B'rachot 55a). As long as it is not interpreted it cannot be fulfilled — and we have an enormous personal responsibility regarding its outcome.

The term dream can also mean a "desired outcome." Two modern dreams of this kind

come to mind when we think of their power to transform nations and inspire a community to action. One is Theodore Hertzl's *"If you will it, it is no dream."* This phrase from his book Old New Land would go on to become the slogan of the Zionist movement, manifest in the establishment of the State of Israel, and be celebrated in the choice of "HaTikvah" (The Hope) as Israel's national anthem. In "HaTikvah," we sing of this hope/dream of 2,000 years to return to our ancestral land a free people. Another dream of this kind that moved a nation to action is Martin Luther King Jr.'s famous "I Have a Dream" speech, where he speaks of a time he hopes is not too distant when, *"my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character"* ("I Have a Dream," Rev. Martin Luther, Jr., August 28, 1963). For Joseph, Hertzl, and King their dreams were not only their own. When shared with others, their dreams became calls to action. Such is the power of dreams, what wakes us from our sleep can also wake a nation and a people from their slumber, complacency, or indifference and enroll them in a shared dream of a better more hopeful future. What is the power of dreams? It lies in their ability to inspire us to make our dreams a reality. *(Rabbi Dan Moskovitz is senior rabbi at Temple Sholom in Vancouver, BC)*

~~~~~  
Yahrtzeits

Francine Nelson remembers her sister Sara Rapaport Amoni (Sara bat Yehudah Leib haCohen v Idel) on Saturday December 19th (Tevet 4)

Francine Nelson also remembers her aunt Esther Miller (Esther Zissel bat Hershel haCohen v Gittel Malta) on Sunday December 20th (Tevet 5).

Craig and Anita Miller remember their daughter Audrey Miller (Leora bat Hannah va Alta) on Wednesday December 23rd (Tevet 8).

~~~~~  
Events at Kol Rina

Friday Torah study and service:

We will begin at 4:00 with Mincha led by Erwin Mevorah, followed at 4:15 by Torah study with Lenny Levin. Kabbalat Shabbat will be led by Treasure and Rich Cohen, beginning at 4:45, and Ma'ariv will be led by Lenny. Nikki will present a d'var on her years at Bezalel Academy of Art and Design in Jerusalem in the 1970s. We hope you will join us!

Use the following Zoom link to attend:

<https://zoom.us/j/533517572?pwd=dVFHR2NGZFBCYWp1Yzd6ald0bzFRdz09>

~~~~~  
Brunch-and-Learn, Sunday, December 20: IFPO

This coming Sunday, Kol Rina's Brunch-and-Learn series will welcome Jodi Cooperman and Diane Stein to speak about the Interfaith Food Pantry of the Oranges. The IFPO has faced huge challenges because of the pandemic and its attendant increase in food insecurity. Come and hear what is being done in our community to alleviate hunger. The program will

take place via Zoom on Sunday, December 20, beginning at 10:30 am. If you have not yet registered through Eventbrite, please click on this link:

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/how-the-interfaith-food-pantry-addresses-food-insecurity-during-covid19-tickets-131756742965>

~~~~~

[Susan Marx paintings available online through Agora Gallery](#)

Our late member Susan Marx z"l left many beautiful paintings to Kol Rina, in addition to the ones that grace our sanctuary. A number of them are available for purchase online through Agora Gallery; proceeds will benefit Kol Rina. [Click here](#) to see the online catalog.