

Kol Rina
An Independent Minyan
Parashat Miketz
December 16, 2023 *** 4 Tevet, 5784

Miketz in a Nutshell

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/default_cdo/aid/15556/jewish/Miketz.htm

The name of the Parshah, "Miketz," means "At the end" and it is found in Genesis 41:1.

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

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/605821/jewish/Haftarah-in-a-Nutshell.htm

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

[Sibling Rivalry: Mikketz by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks z"l](https://www.rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/mikketz/sibling-rivalry/)

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Listen to these words that are among the most fateful and reverberating in all of Jewish history:

Joseph recognised his brothers, but they did not recognise him. Gen. 42:8

The Torah is a deep book. We make a great mistake if we think it can be understood on one superficial level.

On the surface, the story is simple. Envious of him, Joseph's brothers initially planned to kill him. Eventually they sell into slavery. He is taken to Egypt. There, through a series of vicissitudes, he rises to become Prime Minister, second only, in rank and power, to Pharaoh.

It is now many years later. His brothers have come to Egypt to buy food. They come before Joseph, but he no longer looks like the man they knew many years before. Then, he was a seventeen year old called Joseph. Now he is thirty-nine, an Egyptian ruler called Tzofenat Paneach, dressed in official robes with a gold chain around his neck, who speaks Egyptian and uses an interpreter to communicate with these visitors from the land of Canaan. No wonder they did not recognise him, though he recognised them.

But that is only the surface meaning. Deep down the book of Bereishit is exploring the most profound source of conflict in history. Freud thought the great symbol of conflict was Laius and Oedipus, the tension between fathers and sons. Bereishit

thinks otherwise. The root of human conflict is sibling rivalry: Cain and Abel, Isaac and Ishmael, Jacob and Esau, and now Joseph and his brothers.

Joseph has the misfortune of being the youngest. He symbolises the Jewish condition. His brothers are older and stronger than he is. They resent his presence. They see him as a trouble maker. The fact that their father loves him only makes them angrier and more resentful. They want to kill him. In the end they get rid of him in a way that allows them to feel a little less guilty. They concoct a story that they tell their father, and they settle down to life again. They can relax. There is no Joseph to disturb their peace any more.

And now they are facing a stranger in a strange land and it simply does not occur to them that this man may be Joseph. As far as they are concerned, there is no Joseph. They don't recognise him now. They never did. They never recognised him as one of them, as their father's child, as their brother with an identity of his own and a right to be himself.

Joseph is the Jewish people throughout history.

Joseph recognised his brothers, but they did not recognise him.

Judaism was the world's first monotheism but not the last. Two others emerged claiming descent, literal or metaphorical, from Abraham, Christianity and Islam. It would be fair to call the relationship between the three Abrahamic monotheisms, one of sibling rivalry. Far from being of mere antiquarian interest, the theme of Bereishit has been the leitmotiv of the better part of the last two thousand years, with the Jewish people cast in the role of Joseph.

There were times – early medieval Spain was one – when Joseph and his brothers lived together in relative harmony, *convivencia* as they called it. But there were also times – the blood libels, the accusations of poisoning wells or spreading the plague – when they sought to kill him. And others – the expulsions that took place throughout Europe between the English in 1290 and the Spanish in 1492 – when they simply wanted to get rid of him. Let him go and be a slave somewhere else, far from here.

Then came the Holocaust. Then came the State of Israel, the destination of the Jewish journey since the days of Abraham, the homeland of the Jewish people since the days of Joshua. No nation on earth, with the possible exception of the Chinese, has had such a long association with a land.

The day the State was born, 14 May 1948, David Ben Gurion, its Prime Minister, sought peace with its neighbours, and Israel has not ceased seeking peace from then until now.

But this is no ordinary conflict. Israel's opponents – Hamas in Gaza, Hizbollah in Lebanon, President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad of Iran, are not engaged in a border dispute, these boundaries or those. They deny, as a matter of non negotiable religious – not just political – principle, Israel's right to exist within any boundaries whatsoever. There are today 56 Islamic states. But for Israel's neighbours a single Jewish state the size of Wales, is one too many.

Joseph recognised his brothers, but they did not recognise him.

There is no State among the 192 member nations of the United Nations whose very existence is called into question this way. And while we as Jews argue among ourselves as to this policy or that, as if this were remotely relevant to the issue of peace, we fail to focus on the real issue, which is, so long as Joseph's brothers do not recognise his right to be, there can be no peace, merely a series of staging posts on the way to a war that will not end until there is no Jewish state at all.

Until the sibling rivalry is over, until the Jewish people wins the right to be, until people – including we ourselves – realise that the threat Israel faces is ultimate and total, until Iran, Hamas and Hizbollah agree that Jews have a right to their land within any boundaries whatsoever, all other debate is mere distraction.

[A World in Crisis Needs a Yosef by Avi Garelick](https://www.jtsa.edu/torah/a-world-in-crisis-needs-a-yosef/)

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Our society today faces crises of overwhelming proportions on many fronts—some observers have called our situation one of polycrisis, to emphasize how crises interact and amplify each other. Climate change is breathing down our necks, wars proliferate, and pandemics threaten our health, all while governments struggle to react sufficiently. Many who enjoy relative peace and affluence suffer from a sense of helplessness and foreboding. We need a Yosef.

Yosef appears in Parashat Miketz as the savior of Egyptian society from an ecological crisis of epic proportions. Seven straight ruined harvests would have resounded catastrophically across the region if not for Yosef's prescient interventions on Pharaoh's behalf.

One quarter of the way through the 21st century, we cry out for our own Yosef: leadership with the courage to recognize the looming crisis and the aptitude to marshal resources on a global scale.

Was the famine foreseeable? Pharaoh literally saw it in a dream. The truth of the crisis lurked at the threshold of his consciousness. Quite possibly imperial expansion had brought the soil to the point of exhaustion and set the stage for failure. His court interpreters, rooted in Egyptian society, couldn't imagine failure at

such a comprehensive scale, so they couldn't see the warning etched into Pharaoh's dream.

The midrash in Bereishit Rabbah 41:5 suggests that they understood the dreams as seven daughters who would be born to Pharaoh and then die, seven lands that Pharaoh would conquer and that would later rise up. The symbolism is loose, and the events (personal and military) disconnected from each other—they capture only the general flow and ebb of fortune and misfortune but do nothing to satisfy the sense of urgency that Pharaoh seems to feel. As R. Shmuel David Luzzatto writes:

לא היה מי שידע לפתור אותם לפרעה ולהנאתו ולהנאת עמו, כי זה הוא מה שהיה פרעה מבקש, שיבינו מתוך חלומו דבר העתיד לבא על עמו ושיועיל למצרים היותו נודע בטרם יבוא . . . שאם אין אתה אומר כן, מי מנע אותם מאמור לו פתרון ככל העולה על רוחם?

Nobody could interpret the dreams to Pharaoh's and his people's benefit. For this is what Pharaoh was seeking: to understand from his dream something that will happen to his people in the future that it would help them to know in advance . . . for if this is not so, who could stop them from saying any interpretation that came to mind?

Pharaoh feels in his gut that he has received a warning.

Yosef, a young foreigner, sees the clear and unified warning in the dream—the symbolism is tight and the events of the dream focused on one message. Stout cattle and fat grain will give way to starving cattle and blighted grain: it's time to act.

The miracle is not that Yosef could interpret the dream, but that Pharaoh could listen to his dark and inconvenient vision, because God had planted within him — he who had the power—a warning of existential crisis for his people.

We should also listen to the warning in our gut.

Yosef's ability to hear the warning of Pharaoh's dream means his analysis and advice is of value too. He advises the appointment of a steward who is both knowledgeable (navon) and wise (hakham). Incredibly, this convicted adulterer and foreigner has instantly gained the Pharaoh's trust—Pharaoh knows that Yosef is that steward. Bereishit Rabbah provides a vivid analogy for the double qualification: navon vehakham is someone who is both strong and well-armed; someone who both knows what to do and has the means to get it done.

According to Ramban, navon refers to a leader who knows how much grain to distribute to the people to meet their needs and brings the surplus to market to

generate funds for the state; hakham is one who knows how to manage grain storage and avoid rot. That is, wisdom in economic management and agronomy. A broad view of all the moving pieces and intimate understanding of how all the pieces work together. But implied by this is a suggestion of the plan: hold Egyptian society to strict, but not punitive, rations, in order to build up a formidable surplus to survive the lean years.

Yosef's stewardship of the crisis led to a reorganization of Egyptian society, described in detail in chapter 47. Some readers detect a note of critique in the Torah's treatment of this reorganization, even suggesting it may have led to the slavery suffered by the Israelites. But his intervention was undeniably appropriate to the scale of the crisis. Suffering and starvation would have destabilized Egyptian society, with local landowners hoarding grain from their poorer neighbors before depleting their own small stores. Yosef recognized that facing the crisis meant facing entrenched social interests that might not share his and Pharaoh's vision and be reluctant to give up their bounty to a centralized authority. As a magistrate who was *navon vehakham*—intellectually well-armed—Yosef knew big changes wouldn't come easily.

In 2023, our years of plenty have passed and the famine is upon us. The flood waters are rising, and no Noah has built an ark to save us. In a world of rising temperatures and unbalanced, chaotic water systems, the earth's ability to sustain God's creation is in question like never before. And yet even at the dawn of the Anthropocene, a new geological epoch driven by human activity, Northern hemisphere farming is projected to suffer less than the ecospheres of the South, which will be scorched by unlivable heat. We in the US and Canada will find ourselves in a situation similar to Yosef's Egypt, less damaged by ecosystem collapse and facing a wave of refugees looking for our help. We should welcome a Yosef who comes to change our way of life. We don't need a Noah who will build an ark and wall others out; we need leadership that paints a vision for how to help ourselves and make space to help others. *(Avi Garelick is the Principal of the Rebecca and Israel Ivry Prozdor Hight School)*

[The Dangers of Finding Political Meaning in Suffering: Miketz by Rabbi Phillip Gibbs](https://truah.org/resources/philips-gibbs-miketz-moraltorah_2023/)
https://truah.org/resources/philips-gibbs-miketz-moraltorah_2023/

How much meaning do we ascribe to suffering, ours or others'? This week's parshah, which takes us almost to the climax of the story of Joseph and his brothers, provides rich material for exploring that question.

Joseph's brothers do not recognize that the powerful official detaining them is the

brother they sold into slavery many years ago. That grand reveal does not happen until next week.

But the irony of the situation is not lost on the brothers:

“Alas, we are being punished on account of our brother, because we looked on at his anguish, yet paid no heed as he pleaded with us. That is why this distress has come upon us.” ([Genesis 42:21](#))

The dramatic irony of the moment means that Joseph can shape every detail so that the brothers experience a punishment perfectly in line with their past sins. Malbim, the 19th century Eastern European commentator, notes the many correlations and writes:

Joseph intended to cause them pain so that they would receive a tit for tat punishment for their sin. Just as they suspected him of being a spy when he brought reports to Jacob, he accused them of being spies against Egypt. Just as Shimon threw him in a pit with the agreement of the rest of the brothers, Joseph put them all in jail and then bound Shimon alone. Just as they sold him for twenty silver coins, he caused them fear by returning their money to their bags, and just as they sold him to slavery, they recognized that they were his servants, and Judah was prepared to become his slave.

Aside from providing incredible literary detail, does the punishment push the brothers toward repentance? Radak (12th-13th c.) uses this story to teach us that we should find lessons in our own suffering:

When troubles come to someone, it is fitting for them to sift through their behavior to find the wicked deed they did so that they will regret it, confess before God, and ask for forgiveness.

This belief that suffering in this world is punishment for our sins may seem old-fashioned to us, but it has a long Jewish history. One extended passage ([Berachot 5a-b](#)) begins with a call to examine one’s deeds and ends with a story of Rav Huna, who experiences a large financial loss when his barrel of wine turns to vinegar. He believes that his actions were pure, but his students point out his unfair treatment of workers. After Rav Huna repents, a miracle occurs that allows him to recoup his loss. Unlike in the Joseph story, here the punishment is causally unrelated to the misdeed. As with Joseph’s brothers, though, repentance brings full redemption.

The emotional heart of the passage, however, expresses a different attitude towards suffering. Rabbi Yochanan protests against the idea that we should find redemptive meaning in suffering, through both healing those who are deathly ill and publicly mourning the death of his children. Even if the suffering can bring

reward in the next world, Rabbi Yochanan wants none of it. David Kraemer argues that even though the passage ends with the story of Rav Huna, the claim that we should connect our misfortunes to our misdeeds appears vapid next to the moral clarity of Rabbi Yochanan's resistance to suffering. (*Reading the Rabbis*, 140-141)

Returning to the brothers' predicament, Reuven takes this moment to chastise the others, saying, "Did I not tell you, 'Do no wrong to the boy'? But you paid no heed. Now comes the reckoning for his blood." ([Genesis 42:22](#)) Reuven's response shows that even with a theology that sees suffering as just punishment for wicked deeds, people won't always take full responsibility for their actions. If we are supposed to learn lessons from suffering, it is too easy to learn the wrong lessons and use our suffering as a cudgel against others. Reuven may have moderated his brothers' murderous instincts, but he is not innocent.

The brothers ultimately prove that they completed a process of true teshuvah, but should we see the measure for measure punishment as the primary motivation for their repentance, or is it simply a literary flourish in a rich narrative? The language the brothers use when describing Joseph, as well as the immediacy with which they recognize their captivity as divine punishment, implies that they already came to regret their actions. Like Rabbi Yochanan, we should resist the idea that immense suffering is primarily supposed to teach us lessons or seed some sort of future reward. This is also true when we cross over from the realm of spiritual/theological meaning to the realm of the political.

Our capacity for empathy means that suffering should draw our attention, but if we give inherent political meaning to suffering, then we become more likely to let our political analysis overpower our empathy. As we continue to watch the unfolding events in the war in Gaza, we need to distinguish between suffering and accountability. The level of physical and psychological suffering of both Israelis and Palestinians is too much to bear. While empathy should push us to provide care and urgently support a swift path towards calm, we should be careful in how we glean political meaning from the increasingly dire humanitarian crisis.

We must continue to explore and debate how decades of policies and failed geopolitical processes led to this moment and continue to exacerbate the core problems. Understanding the past and finding a causal chain to current events, however, should never condone the suffering of either Israeli victims of terror attacks and their families or Palestinian civilians. A just peace will require difficult work of reconciliation and accountability, and any path forward will inevitably include unspeakable suffering. Like Rabbi Yochanan, we should resist the idea that the suffering itself is a source of political meaning. When we see suffering as the inherent instructor, we risk learning the wrong lessons. (*Rabbi Philip Gibbs was in the*

inaugural class of T'ruah Israel Fellows. Since his ordination from JTS in 2017, Rabbi Gibbs has served Har El, a congregation in Vancouver.)

Parshat Miketz: Many Tribes, One Family by Rabbi Dr. Kenneth Brander
<https://ots.org.il/parshat-miketz-many-tribes-one-family/>

Not one sibling relationship in the Torah had yet been successful. Kayin and Hevel, Yitzhak and Yishmael, Yaakov and Eisav – each pair faced discord and animosity, if not worse. But Parshat Miketz portrays a key turning point in the long arc of Sefer Bereishit towards brotherly love. Recognizing the importance of redeeming Shimon and saving the whole family, Yehuda steps up to the plate, committing to Yaakov that he will bring Binyamin, along with Shimon, safely home. In a clear display of personal responsibility for family, he declares: “I myself will be surety for him; you may hold me responsible: if I do not bring him back to you and set him before you, I shall stand guilty before you forever” (Bereishit 43:9).

This shift, which takes place in our parsha, is reflected in the Torah’s careful choice of words. While they are elsewhere referred to as the children of Jacob or Israel, the namesakes of the tribes are, for the first time, called “the brothers of Joseph” as they begin their descent to Egypt. The Midrash Tanchuma (Miketz #8) notices this shift in terminology, and suggests that it is indicative of the underlying change in heart. “The Torah ought to have called them the children of Israel. However, while earlier they showed him no brotherhood and sold him, in the end they felt regret... and agreed unanimously to attempt to save him.” Evidently, with the threat of famine hanging over their heads, the need for unity overcame the animosities of the past, and energized the brothers of Joseph as they set out on their rescue mission.

Indeed, the transition from last week’s parsha to this week’s parsha is also seen in the character of Yosef. Prior to this week’s parsha Yosef only interpreted dreams that focused on himself and his aspirations – even if the interpretations were to be actualized at someone else’s expense, be that his dreams of overcoming his brothers, or his interpretations for the butler and baker which he uses to hasten his release from prison. But in Parshat Miketz, Yosef starts to interpret dreams on behalf of others, on behalf of the nation of Egypt, helping to save the Egyptian people as well as his whole family from starvation (thank you Yeshiva University President Emeritus Richard Joel and Seth Goldstein for this additional point).

We too are facing a moment of crisis, and we too stand upon an inflection point in how we treat one another. Just months ago, the various sectors of Israeli society were as divided as they ever were, with acrimony and divisiveness running high.

Prior to October 7, our dreams only focused on ourselves and what we wanted. Yet when tragedy struck on the seventh of October, it became clear to all of us that we needed to put aside our differences and find common purpose and solidarity in this trying moment, to treat one another like brothers and sisters.

We cannot afford to be divided when everything and everyone we cherish is at stake. But we must consider how to sustain this unity beyond this time of crisis. What will each of us do to maintain this brotherly bond once the battlefield quiets? When we are no longer baking cookies and challot together, or sleeping alongside one another in the same tanks and tents? What will happen when the emergency ebbs and our differences resurface? We must never forget: we are indeed many tribes, but we will always be one family. We must let the existential values binding us now continue to guide us during the inevitable disagreements ahead so that the ubiquitous phrase "Together we will triumph" will not ring hollow after the war drums fade. Our shared morals cannot expire with the threats they rose to meet, and if we commit to nurturing this spirit, our nation will outlast any single victory. Together, we will not only survive but thrive. *(Rabbi Dr. Kenneth Brander is President and Rosh HaYeshiva of Ohr Torah Stone)*

Yahrtzeits

Francine Nelson remembers her sister Sara Rapaport Amoni on Sat. Dec.16 and her aunt Ester Miller on Sun. Dec. 17.

Craig and Anita Miller remember their daughter Audrey Miller on Wed.Dec. 20.