

Kol Rina
An Independent Minyan
Parashat Miketz
December 28, 2024 *** 27 Kislev 5785

Miketz in a Nutshell

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/3213/jewish/Miketz-in-a-Nutshell.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 for Shabbat Chanukah: Zechariah 2:14 – 4:7

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

This prophecy was communicated by Zechariah shortly before the building of the Second Temple. The haftarah opens with a vivid depiction of the joy that will prevail when G-d will return to Jerusalem: "Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion, for, behold! I will come and dwell in your midst, says the L-rd."

The prophet then describes a scene in the Heavenly Court: Satan was seeking to incriminate Joshua, the first High Priest to serve in the Second Temple, because of the "soiled garments" (i.e. sins) he was wearing. G-d himself defends the High Priest: "And the Lord said to Satan: The Lord shall rebuke you, O Satan; the Lord

who chose Jerusalem shall rebuke you. Is [Joshua] not a brand plucked from fire?" I.e., how dare Satan prosecute an individual who endured the hardships of exile? "And He raised His voice and said to those standing before him, saying, 'Take the filthy garments off him.' And He said to him, 'See, I have removed your iniquity from you, and I have clad you with clean garments.'"

G-d then proceeds to outline the rewards awaiting Joshua if he and his descendents follow G-d's ways. The ultimate reward is, "Behold! I will bring My servant, the Shoot, " an allusion to Moshiach, the Shoot of David.

Zechariah then describes a vision of a golden seven-branched Menorah. An angel interprets the meaning of this vision: "This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel [descendent of King David, one of the protagonists in the building of the Second Temple], 'Not by military force and not by physical strength, but by My spirit,' says the Lord of Hosts." Meaning that Zerubbabel's descendent, Moshiach, will have no difficulty in his task, it will be as simple as lighting a menorah.

[FOOD FOR THOUGHT](#)

[The Author of Our Lives: Miketz by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks z"l \(5772\)](#)

<https://rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/miketz/the-author-of-our-lives/>

It was Joseph's first real attempt to take his fate into his own hands, and it failed. Or so it seemed.

Consider the story so far, as set out in last week's Parsha. Almost everything that happens in Joseph's life falls into two categories. The first are the things done to him. His father loves him more than his other sons. He gives him a richly embroidered cloak. His brothers are envious and feel hatred towards him. His father sends him to see how the brothers are faring, attending the flocks far away. He fails to find them and has to rely on a stranger to point him in the right direction. The brothers plot to kill him, throw him in a pit, and then sell him as a slave. He is brought to Egypt. He is acquired as a slave by Potiphar. Potiphar's wife finds him attractive, attempts to seduce him, and having failed, falsely accuses him of rape, as a result of which he is imprisoned.

This is extraordinary. Joseph is the centre of attention whenever he is, as it were, onstage, and yet he is, time and again, the done-to rather than the doer, an object of other people's actions rather than the subject of his own.

The second category is more remarkable still. Joseph does do things. He dreams. He runs Potiphar's household superbly. He organises a prison. He interprets the steward's and baker's dreams. But, in a unique sequence of descriptions, the Torah explicitly attributes his actions and their success to God.

Here is Joseph in Potiphar's house:

God was with Joseph, and He made him very successful. Soon he was working in his master's own house. His master realised that God was with [Joseph], and that God granted success to everything he did. Gen. 39:2-3

As soon as [his master] had placed him in charge of his household and possessions, God blessed the Egyptian because of Joseph. God's blessing was in all [the Egyptian] had, both in the house and the field. Gen. 39:5

When Joseph is in prison, we read:

God was with Joseph, and He showed him kindness, making him find favour with the warden of the dungeon. Soon the warden had placed all the prisoners in the dungeon under Joseph's charge. [Joseph] took care of everything that had to be done. The warden did not have to look after anything that was under [Joseph's] care. God was with [Joseph], and God granted him success in everything he did. Gen. 39:21-23

And here is Joseph interpreting dreams:

"Interpretations are God's business," replied Joseph. "If you want to, tell me about [your dreams]." Gen. 40:8

Of no other figure in Tanach is this said so clearly, consistently, and repeatedly. Joseph seems decisive, organised, and successful, and so he appeared to others. But, says the Torah, it was not him but God who was responsible both for what he did and for its success. Even when he resists the advances of Potiphar's wife, he makes it explicit that it is God who makes what she wants morally impossible:

"How could I do such a great wrong? It would be a sin before God!" Gen. 39:9

The only act clearly attributed to him occurs at the very start of the story, when he brings a "bad report" about his brothers, the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah the handmaids.[1] This apart, every twist and turn of his constantly changing fate is the result of someone else's act, either that of another human or of God.[2]

That is why we sit up and take notice when, at the end of the previous Parsha, Joseph takes destiny into his own hands. Having told the chief steward that in three days he would be pardoned by Pharaoh and restored to his former position, and having no doubt at all that this would happen, he asks him to plead his cause with Pharaoh and secure his freedom:

"When things go well for you, just remember that I was with you. Do me this favour and say something about me to Pharaoh. Perhaps you will be able to get me out of this place." Gen. 40:14

What happens? “The chief steward did not remember Joseph. He forgot about him. (Gen. 40:23)” The doubling of the verb is powerful. He did not remember. He forgot. The one time Joseph tries to be the author of his own story, he fails. The failure is decisive.

Tradition added one final touch to the drama. It ended Parshat Vayeshev with those words, leaving us at the very point that his hopes are dashed. Will he rise to greatness? Will his dreams come true? The question 'What happens next?' is intense, and we have to wait a week to find out.

Time passes and with the utmost improbability (Pharaoh too has dreams, and none of his magicians or wise men can interpret them – itself odd, since dream interpretation was a specialty of the ancient Egyptians), we learn the answer. “Two full years passed.” Those, the words with which our Parsha begins, are the key phrase. What Joseph sought to happen, happened. He did leave the prison. He was set free. But not until two full years had passed.

Between the attempt and the outcome, something intervened. That is the significance of the lapse of time. Joseph planned his release, and he was released, but not because he planned it. His own attempt ended in failure. The steward forgot all about him. But God did not forget about him. God, not Joseph, brought about the sequence of events – specifically Pharaoh’s dreams – that led to his release.

What we want to happen, happens, but not always when we expect, or in the way we expect, or merely because we wanted it to happen. God is the co-author of the script of our life, and sometimes – as here – He reminds us of this by making us wait and taking us by surprise.

That is the paradox of the human condition as understood by Judaism. On the one hand we are free. No religion has so emphatically insisted on human freedom and responsibility. Adam and Eve were free not to sin. Cain was free not to kill Abel. We make excuses for our failures – it wasn’t me; it was someone else’s fault; I couldn’t help it. But these are just that: excuses. It isn’t so. We are free and we do bear responsibility.

Yet, as Hamlet said: “There’s a divinity that shapes our ends/ Rough-hew them how we will.” God is intimately involved in our life. Looking back in middle or old age, we can often discern, dimly through the mist of the past, that a story was taking shape, a destiny slowly emerging, guided in part by events beyond our control. We could not have foreseen that this accident, that illness, this failure, that seemingly chance encounter, years ago, would have led us in this direction. Yet now in retrospect it can seem as if we were a chess piece moved by an invisible hand that knew exactly where it wanted us to be.

It was this view, according to Josephus, that distinguished the Pharisees (the

architects of what we call rabbinic Judaism) from the Sadducees and the Essenes. The Sadducees denied fate. They said God does not intervene in our lives. The Essenes attributed all to fate. They believed that everything we do has been predestined by God. The Pharisees believed in both fate and freewill. “It was God’s good pleasure that there should be a fusion [of Divine providence and human choice] and that the will of man with his virtue and vice should be admitted to the council-chamber of fate” (Antiquities, xviii, 1, 3).

Nowhere is this clearer than in the life of Joseph as told in Bereishit, and nowhere more so than in the sequence of events told at the end of last week’s Parsha and the beginning of this. Without Joseph’s acts – his interpretation of the steward’s dream and his plea for freedom – he would not have left prison. But without Divine intervention in the form of Pharaoh’s dreams, it would also not have happened.

This is the paradoxical interplay of fate and freewill. As Rabbi Akiva said: “All is foreseen yet freedom of choice is given” (Avot 3:15). Isaac Bashevis Singer put it wittily: “We have to believe in freewill: we have no choice.” We and God are co-authors of the human story. Without our efforts we can achieve nothing. But without God’s help we can achieve nothing either. Judaism found a simple way of resolving the paradox. For the bad we do, we take responsibility. For the good we achieve, we thank God. Joseph is our mentor. When he is forced to act harshly, he weeps. But when he tells his brothers of his success, he attributes it to God. That is how we too should live. [1] Genesis 37:2 [2] As for Joseph’s dreams – were they a Divine intimation or a product of his own imagination? – that is another story for another time.

[The World that Isn't There: Miketz by Joel Seltzer](https://www.jtsa.edu/torah/the-world-that-isnt-there/)
<https://www.jtsa.edu/torah/the-world-that-isnt-there/>

Years ago, I read a book by the author Chuck Klosterman titled But What if We’re Wrong? The premise of the book is to attempt to “think about the present as if it were the past,” or in other words, to consider whether despite our current devotion to rationality and the scientific method, there are aspects of our modern world about which we might be profoundly wrong?

In a chapter called “The World that Isn’t There,” Klosterman explores the concept of dreaming:

“For most of human history, the act of dreaming was considered deeply important, almost like a spiritual interaction with a higher power The zenith of dream seriousness occurred at the turn of the twentieth century, defined by the work of Sigmund Freud (who thought dreams were everything) and his adversarial protégé Carl Jung (who thought dreams were more than everything—they were glimpses into a collective unconscious, shared by everyone who’s ever lived.)”

But all that changed over the course of the twentieth century. As Klosterman

explains, when science began to map the brain's electrical activity in 1924, "from that point forward, dreams increasingly mattered less dreams were just the byproduct of the brain stem firing chaotically during sleep. Since then, the conventional scientific sentiment has become that—while we don't totally understand why dreaming happens—the dreams themselves are meaningless. Which seems like a potentially massive misjudgment."

In the Torah, dreams are anything but meaningless. The Joseph narrative ([Gen. 37–50](#)) is dominated by dream motifs. At first, those dreams are the cause of Joseph's downfall—by sharing his two dreams in which he envisions his family bowing down to him, he raises the ire of his brothers, who conspire to kill him, saying:

*They said to one another, "Here comes that **dreamer!** Come now, let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits; and we can say, 'A savage beast devoured him.' We shall see what comes of his **dreams!**"* ([Gen. 37: 19–20](#)).

Later, in Chapter 40, Joseph's ability to interpret dreams moves the drama of the narrative further:

*Both of them—the cupbearer and the baker of the king of Egypt, who were confined in the prison—**dreamed in the same night, each his own dream and each dream with its own meaning.***

And lastly, this week's parashah, Parashat Miketz, begins with a dream sequence, this time of Pharaoh himself:

*After two years' time, Pharaoh **dreamed** that he was standing by the Nile.*

Ultimately, it is the cupbearer's remembrance of Joseph as someone who could correctly interpret dreams that leads to Joseph's (and his family's) salvation.

So how might we as moderns balance our scientific rationality regarding dream interpretation with the mystical potential that our dreams are glimpses into the future?

The Hasidic Rabbi Yosef Patzanovski (1875–1942) attempted to find just this balance in a comment he offers on this week's parashah.

"On the matter of dreams, our sages said that there are dreams which come into being as a direct result of bodily functions, like digestion of food, changes in the weather, the state of one's mental health, etc. and these are dreams that are inconsequential and meaningless. However, there are other types of dreams which are forms of instruction and enlightenment from the Heavens. As our sages of blessed memory said (B. [Talmud Berakhot 57a](#)): 'Dreams are one sixtieth of prophecy.'"

Undoubtedly, some of our dreams are simply the result of our brains staying active while our bodies rest. But what about those dreams, like Joseph's vision of his family's subservience, which feel like glimpses into the future or windows into the past? How can I explain the fact that humans often share the same dream? That one where the university you graduated from 25 years ago tells you that you are a couple of credits shy of graduating? Or what about dreams where we are visited by family members long gone, or friends long forgotten? And what about the Jew by Choice who tells you that they used to dream of their childhood home, but there was a secret door only they knew about, one that led them into a secret part of the home, one they always opened before the dream ended? Each of these dreams may be an echo of prophecy, a gift from God (or our subconscious?) which can offer insight, understanding, and truth; so why would we discount them as merely "the byproduct of the brain stem"?

Perhaps the answer to these questions can be found in Joseph's consistent approach to the delicate art of dream interpretation. Each time Joseph is asked to interpret a dream, his response is always the same, a humble recognition that it is God, not Joseph, who provides the interpretation.

When the cupbearer and the baker ask Joseph to interpret their dreams he replies:

And they said to him, "We had dreams, and there is no one to interpret them." So Joseph said to them, "Surely God can interpret! Tell me [your dreams]."

And again, when Pharaoh brings Joseph out of prison to interpret his nightmares on the Nile, Joseph responds:

Joseph answered Pharaoh, saying, "Not !! God will see to Pharaoh's welfare."

In our modern times, let us not fall into the trap of assuming that our understanding of the world (and even our bodies) is complete and infallible. Instead, like Joseph, let us consistently surrender to mystery, and open our minds to the possibility of prophecy, each time we lie down to sleep. *(Rabbi Joel Seltzer is the Vice Chancellor for Institutional Advancement at JTS and it is the 31st anniversary of his Bar Mitzvah.)*

[Chanukah: Don't Remain in Darkness by Rabbi James Greene](https://truah.org/resources/james-greene-chanukah-moraltorah_2024_/)

https://truah.org/resources/james-greene-chanukah-moraltorah_2024_/

Parshat Miketz picks up with the story of Joseph as a prisoner in Egypt and follows him on his journey to becoming Pharaoh's vizier. (Genesis 41:1-44:17) Read during Chanukah, it is hard to ignore this story of moving from darkness to light and the echo that reverberates to the holiday as well as to our contemporary world.

I have always been fascinated by the question of how many days we celebrate

Chanukah. When the Maccabees returned to the Temple in Jerusalem after it was desecrated, they searched for enough oil to light all the lights in the Temple. They found one small jar of oil that still had the seal of the High Priest, but it seemed sufficient to keep the lights lit for just one day. It would take eight days until new oil could be brought to the Temple. But then, as we all know, a miracle happened, and the oil lasted for eight days. So here is the real question: Since the oil was expected to last for one day, and it lasted for eight days, shouldn't the miracle of the oil be seven? The first day, everything happened exactly as expected — what miracle are we commemorating exactly?

A colleague shared a teaching from Rabbi David Hartman with me that taught that the miracle of the first day of Chanukah is that they bothered to light the lights at all. Rabbi Hartman explained,

They took a leap of faith, with absolutely no assurance that it would be successful. They lit the oil even though they knew it was insufficient. And anything important in Jewish history and in world history has only been accomplished because people have been willing to take that kind of leap of faith and leap of action, and have been willing to embark on a process when they did not know whether or not it would succeed.

What an incredible testament to the spirit of Jewish resilience and commitment to justice! Without any expectation or guarantee of success, they did this small thing because they had a belief that delaying the work was simply untenable.

We are in a moment of darkness. Many of us are anxious about the coming years and how the incoming administration will attempt to roll back gains in human rights that have been hard-fought and won — often through the dedicated work of our colleagues and communities. In my work at Jewish Family Service, I serve refugee and humanitarian entrant clients who fear for their safety given the rhetoric and policy priorities espoused by our nation's most powerful leaders. We are in a dark time, but delaying the work of justice is simply untenable!

The story of Chanukah, and likewise the story of Joseph's transformation, is a reminder that the darkest moments can turn into miraculous ones. Not miracles that are external, but rather ones that occur because we choose to believe, to push forward, and to light the lights; demanding a world that is more loving, more just, and more holy. This week, even though I don't know where the rest of the oil is coming from, I choose to light a candle and bring more light into this world because it is simply untenable to remain in the darkness any longer.

Joseph's story is full of miracles, but not great miracles like the splitting of the Sea of Reeds or the receiving of Torah at Sinai. Rather, his story — and the story of Chanukah — is about the sometimes less-seen miracles of perseverance and resilience that have given us the confidence and faith to pursue our dreams in a

world characterized sometimes by moments of light and at other times by intense darkness. There is comfort to be found in these narratives for those who are experiencing darkness today. Light will come — we just need to commit to the belief that darkness is unacceptable.

May we take extra time this Chanukah to celebrate the small miracles that build our capacity for resilience and resistance. And may the coming holiday season be full of commitments to lighting the lights of justice and serve as a pathway to rededicate ourselves to the work ahead, just as it has been for our ancestors in generations past. Chag Urim Sameach — Happy Chanukah!

(Rabbi James Greene is the chief executive officer of Jewish Family Service (JFS) of Western Massachusetts. Based in Springfield, MA, JFS is one of the largest refugee resettlement agencies in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. He is a 2008 graduate of the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College and is the immediate past president of the Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association.)

[Miketz: The Song Of The Land – A Torah Teaching For The Western Environment](https://www.growtorah.org/breisheit/2021/12/1-parshat-mikeitz-the-song-of-the-land-a-torah-teaching-for-the-western-environmentalist)
[by Rabbi Shaul David Judelman](https://www.growtorah.org/breisheit/2021/12/1-parshat-mikeitz-the-song-of-the-land-a-torah-teaching-for-the-western-environmentalist)

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At the beginning of Parshat Miketz, we hear about the coming years of plenty and years of drought to follow. While there are certainly lessons to be learned about drought, a culture of excess, and the implementation of responsible agricultural practices, we will focus our attention elsewhere. An insight of less obvious, but just as far-reaching magnitude lies in our parsha.

Much of Parshat Miketz is centered around Yosef's interpersonal relationships with his family members and on Yosef the person, not Yosef the leader. It is on this personal level that we can, perhaps, learn the most. The favorite son who was, years before, left for dead by his jealous brothers has come to power in Mitzrayim and is in charge of dispensing the only food stores in the region. Yaakov sends a "care package" down with his sons to the ruler, gifting him with fruits from the land of Israel.[1] Rebbe Nachman writes that Yaakov was sending this mysterious ruler of Mitzrayim a taste of the Land of Israel.[2] When Yaakov sends Yosef the package, the Torah calls it "zimrat ha'aretz," the song of the land. Onkelos understands this phrase to mean "the crops that a land is praised for."

The connection between fruits, taste, and song is a rather significant theme in Jewish agriculture. As the Mishna in Bikurim (First Fruits) describes, the bringing of the first fruits to Yerushalayim in the days of the Beit HaMikdash was accompanied by music.[3]

In the Torah text, the trope (musical notation) that hover over the letters are called

the ta'amim, a word that literally means "taste." Kabbalah teaches that these "tastes" reveal the secret meaning of the text. And, when Yosef receives the offering of the tastes of his homeland, it is the start of the sequence wherein Yosef begins crying for home.[4]

The tastes of a place can become indelibly etched into our memories. I have an uncle who hasn't been to Israel in twenty years, and what I hear him asking for is "one of those Israeli tomatoes or cucumbers." Taste is beyond words, yet somehow contains the experience of a place.

An experience that is, by definition, beyond words, finds its voice through taste and song. The fruits of the land have the power to bring us back to a place of pure connection.

It is important to remember that the offering is being sent during a drought. It is a way of impressing and appeasing a foreign leader into giving them food. So what might be taken as Yaakov showing a natural and normal pride in his native land takes on additional meaning. We might notice that other than a bit of honey, the products that Yaakov sends to Yosef (balm, honey, gum, pistachio nuts, ladanum, and almonds) are not the fruits of Israel we are most familiar with. Instead of highlighting his need, or despairing at the limitations of the land, Yaakov highlights and displays the products that he is able to offer. Together, he and Yosef join in the song of the land, engaging in joy and connection even at a time of hardship.

It is crucial for our own sanity as people who live and care for the world that we engage in this form of personal connection with the fruits and joy of the land. Although the media coverage of the environment often borders on apocalyptic, we are still able to reconnect with the land, with who and where we are; there is always joy and pride to be found in the land. We can then share this level of experience with our neighbors and friends as a part of our path, just as Yaakov and Yosef engaged, not only in the hard work of providing for their families and nations in drought but in an act of pride and hope. (*Shaul Judelman teaches at Yeshivat Simchat Shlomo and is coordinator at Roots, a grassroots movement that aims to improve the co-existence of Israelis and Palestinians through local initiatives.*)

[1] Bereisheit 43:11; The simplest meaning of these words is the "trimmings of the land."

[2] Likutey Moharan, Part II:63 [3] Mishna, Bikurim, 3:3 [4] Bereisheit 43:25-30

Yahrtzeits

Blossom Primer remembers Irwin's mother Sarah Primer on Sun. Dec.29

Stuart Sender remembers his father Jack Sender on Sun. Dec. 29

Harriet Hessdorf remembers her father Herbert Achtentuch on Mon. Dec. 30 and her mother Miriam Achtentuch on Thur. Jan. 2

