

Parshat Miketz

Our Complicated, Broken, and Beautiful Dreams

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In a perfect world, Parshat Miketz could have been a multi-chaptered testament of dreams manifested and hopes and aspirations fulfilled. For Pharaoh, he would benefit from Yosef's successful predictions of Egypt's economy. For Yosef's brothers, they would gratefully accept their food rations. For Yaakov, his hopes would involve complete sibling reunification and the coming together of his whole family. For Yosef, his initial dreams of towering over all his brothers would come true, and he would only see the tops of their heads as they bowed to him.

In a sense, these dreams and wishes actually do unfold, albeit not impeccably. Our ancestors' path to seeing the outcomes of their dreams and aspirations in Parshat Miketz mirrors our own journeys. The gap between the things we wish for ourselves and what we actually receive in life is often neither linear nor perfect but perhaps speaks to what we each need.

In the fourth aliyah we witness an image of Yosef's dream coming to life. His brothers traveled to Egypt amidst a famine in order to receive food rations from him. They were sent by their father empty-handed and vulnerable, dependent on the favor of Yosef--the one who holds the power:

וְיוֹסֵף הוּא הַשְּׁלִיט עַל-הָאָרֶץ הוּא הַמְּשָׁבִיר לְכָל-עַם הָאָרֶץ וַיָּבֵאוּ אֵת יוֹסֵף וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ-לוֹ אַפַּיִם אָרְצָה
“Now Joseph was the master of the land; it was he who dispensed rations to all the people of the land. And Joseph's brothers came and bowed low to him, with their faces to the ground” (Bereshit 42:6)

This striking image of Yosef's brothers' posture, bowing like sheaves in a field, should be the ideal enactment of everything Yosef wanted! Yet we see in his tone in the following pasuk that Yosef did not feel satisfied: “...וַיְדַבֵּר אֲתָם קָשׁוֹת וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם מֵאֵין בָּאתֶם...” “And he spoke to them harshly and he asked them ‘Where do you come from?’” While Yosef recognized his brothers, he spoke with *kashot*--with hardness--that enveloped him over time when apart from his family. We also can feel Yosef's hardened heart toward his family reflected in the naming of his son, Menashe, stating that “God has made me completely forget the hardship of my father's house” (41:51).

It is actually Yaakov Avinu in his old age back in Canaan who serves as his family's dream catcher and visionary. When there is global famine, it is Yaakov who sees the opportunity to gather food: “וַיֵּרָא יַעֲקֹב כִּי יֵשׁ-שֹׁבֵר בְּמִצְרַיִם”, “Yaakov saw that there were food rations in Egypt” --fragments of meals that could assuage their hunger. If we expand our definition of rations (*shever*), we watch Yaakov see brokenness (*shever*) in Egypt. He sees fractures of his family, once complete and whole. Shattered relationships and broken dreams have left Yaakov's



29 Kislev I Friday, December 3, 2021

children in their own spiritual famine, and he pushed them to go seek the brokenness in Egypt and come back with full hands and hearts. The break that Yosef felt from his family had a ripple effect in his speech, his tone, and on the gap separating him from reconciliation with his brothers.

Yet, the Torah and rabbinic literature at large loves broken things. The Talmud in Masechet Chagiga 15a introduces a beautiful image of teshuva and repairing

אָמַר לוֹ רַבִּי עֲקִיבָא רַבֵּהּ ... מָה קָלִי זָהָב וּכְלִי זָכוּתִית אָף עַל פִּי שְׁנֵשְׁבְרוּ יֵשׁ לָהֶם תִּקְוָה אָף תִּלְמִיד חֹכֵם אָף עַל פִּי שְׁפָרַח יֵשׁ לוֹ תִקְוָה.

Rabbi Akiva, your teacher, taught: Just as golden vessels and glass vessels have a remedy even when they have broken, as they can be melted down and made into new vessels, so too a Torah scholar, although he has transgressed, has a remedy.

There are *takanot* (remedies) for hardened feelings, distanced relationships, and the brokenness in trying to bring dreams into fruition. Sure, Yosef may have helped Pharaoh build grain houses, and he eventually helps his brothers reconnect to him only after they fall toward him desperately like his envisioned sheaves. But it's Yaakov who--from afar--can see brokenness penetrating an already famished people, and empower his scattered sons to be gathered together like a bouquet of waving sheaves.

Shever--defined as both rations and broken things, lastly, can be defined as *shavar* or hope. The dreams of this week's parsha are fraught and complicated; fulfilled dreams are the ones built and rebuilt, edited, and refitted over and over again on hope. They can melt down our inner *kashot*--hardness and resistance to change--in order to create newness from their fragments. Yaakov Avinu teaches Yosef how our dreams can enable us to repair ruptures and to pursue our hunger for connection. He becomes a fulfillment of our Tehillim:

"הַלוֹךְ יֵלֵךְ וּבֹכֵה נֹשֵׂא מִשְׁרָה־הַזֶּרַע בְּאֵיבָא בְרִנָּה נֹשֵׂא אֶלְמִתִּיּוֹ:"

"Though he goes along weeping, carrying the seedbag; he shall come back with songs of joy, carrying his sheaves." (Psalm 126)



Emily Goldberg Winer was born and raised in South Florida, but moved to New York City in high school. She loves community building and sharing Torah with people from all walks of life and across generations. She currently works as the rabbinic intern at the Stanton Street Shul on the Lower East Side. Her most recent positions include rabbinic intern at the Columbia/Barnard Hillel and Congregation Beth Sholom/Talmud Torah, visiting chaplain at Bedford Hills Correctional Facility, community educator at Brandeis, and teen coordinator at the Hebrew Home of Riverdale. She completed the Jewish Innovation Fellowship at the 92nd Street Y, the Join for Justice Fellowship, and the rabbinic student fellowship at Shalom Hartman Institute. A Wexner Graduate Fellow and Master's student at Yeshiva University, Emily loves pluralism and interfaith dialogue. She has engaged in programs rooted in religious diversity, first among fellow Jews at the Bronfman Youth Fellowship and Drisha, and later across faiths at the Institute for Jewish-Christian Understanding, Tanenbaum, and Auburn Seminary. She graduated Magna Cum Laude from Muhlenberg College in Allentown, PA with degrees in Religion and Jewish

29 Kislev I Friday, December 3, 2021

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