

## Parshat Miketz

### Finding Joy In The Snow

Rabba Sara Hurwitz - President and Co-Founder

Right now, while I am preparing these words, the rest of my family is outside enjoying the snow. Armed with snow pants and masks, they are sledding and sliding, shoveling, and throwing snowballs. There's something about this particular snowfall that has generated a sense of playfulness and joy. Perhaps it's because this is the first snow of the season or really of the past two winters. Perhaps it's because we have been cooped up, with nothing much to look forward to. When I found out that there was snow coming, I felt a sudden flood of warmth. My kid's school sent out an uncharacteristically humorous email, a break from the usual doom and gloom about pending covid cases. This email demanded that students and teachers alike take the day off, go outside and play in the snow. It struck me that more than ever, this is exactly what we needed. A little light and playfulness at a time that feels heavy and burdened.

It was with this frame of mind that I looked to our parsha. Yet, despite the memories of laughter and joy from listening to the Joseph soundtrack on long family drives when I was a kid, the Joseph narrative is anything but light. It is filled with deceit, intrigue, and fear. Paroah's dreams are one of the more bizarre episodes, with images of cows eating cows and wheat consuming wheat. Now, we have the advantage of knowing what the dreams mean, but the Torah tells us that Paroah and all his wise men did not understand it, leaving Paroah with "a spirit that was agitated

(41:8) "וַתִּפְעַם רוּחוֹ"

His ruah was disturbed and uneasy. Paroah could not see clearly what the future could hold. But then, just a few pasukim later, that same word, ruach, is used again. This time, after Yosef interprets Paroah's dreams, he describes Yosef as having "ruach Elokim, the spirit of God" (41:38).

וַיֹּאמֶר פַּרְעֹה אֶל-עֲבָדָיו הֲנִמְצָא כָזֶה אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר רוּחַ אֱלֹהִים בּוֹ:

And Pharaoh said to his courtiers, "Could we find another like him, a man in whom is the spirit of God?"

How was this ruach different from Paroah's? Yosef could have heard the dream, and focused on the negative, on pending famine and hardship. Yet, his gift was that he could hear Paroah's descriptions of cows and wheat and see within those images optimism in the face of darkness when no one else could. He could see that the cows and lush wheat sets the stage for a period of plenty, filled with tranquility and joy.

In fact, Yosef's ruach is associated entirely with the ability to uncover joy. This is the interpretation of Rebbe Nachman of Breslov living in the late 18th century. It is known that Rebbe Nachman suffered from what he called "malaise" or depression. Yet, it is he that connects this ruach with joy. Yosef's ruach was that he could look at Paroah's dream and discern "all of the pathways that lead to joy and have the knowledge and skill to connect even the deepest darkness to joy." And, although Paroah could see that Yosef is wise, Rebbe Nachman explains that it is an "extraordinary intelligence that comes from his ability to connect Yosef's mind to the roots of joy" (Volume 4, Issue 10).

One last reference to ruach in these stories - this time, it is Yaakov, Yosef's father, who has ruach. Next week we will read that after Yaakov heard that his son was alive, the Torah says: **וַתְּחִי רוּחַ יַעֲקֹב אֲבִיהֶם**  
the spirit of their father Jacob is revived. (45:27)

Here too the Midrash associates ruach with joy. When Yaakov understood that his beloved son was alive, his melancholy feeling was lifted and he felt a sense of tremendous joy and happiness for the first time in many years, and the Divine Presence immediately returned to him.

I don't have a crystal ball, or ruach hakodesh. I don't know what the future will bring. But perhaps the message here is that we all have ruach; we all have an inherent center that guides us. And we can choose to navigate through with Paroah's **רוּחַ תַּפְעֻם** a spirit that is disturbed. Or with Yosef's ruach Elokim or Yaakov's ruach - a spirit that seeks joy and optimism.

In today's world, there is time and place for both. There is time for anger and agitation. And I spend more time than I care to admit being angry at things both in and out of my control. Like not seeing family because of the pandemic or over world events. And, sometimes, it is that agitation that spurs us into action and brings about the changes that we want to see. But, I must ask myself when it is just as productive to let go of anger, and make space for ruach Elokim, for the possibility of radical joy and happiness. We all need a bit more playfulness in our lives. Especially now, when the world feels so dark. Every now and then, let's open ourselves up to that ruach.

In the meantime, I'm going outside to join my children and play in the snow!



Rabba Sara Hurwitz, Co-Founder and President of Maharat, the first institution to ordain Orthodox women as clergy, also serves on the Rabbinic staff at the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale.

Rabba Hurwitz completed Drisha's three-year Scholars Circle Program, an advanced intensive program of study for Jewish women training to become scholars, educators and community leaders. After another five years of study under the auspices of Rabbi Avi Weiss, she was ordained by Rabbi Weiss and Rabbi Daniel Sperber in 2009.

In 2013 Rabba Hurwitz was awarded the Hadassah Foundation Bernice S. Tannenbaum prize, and the Myrtle Wreath Award from the Southern New Jersey Region of Hadassah in 2014. In 2016 she was the Trailblazer Award Recipient at UJA Federation of New York. She was named as one of Jewish Week's

36 Under 36, the Forward50 most influential Jewish leaders, and Newsweek's 50 most influential rabbis. In 2017 Rabba Hurwitz was chosen to be a member of the inaugural class of Wexner Foundation Field Fellows.