

1. Intro
 - A. Personal- 56th anniversary of BM
 - B. Beginning of Joseph story
 - C. Ernie Rabinowicz said that Joseph is biblical figure most like us: someone with his feet in 2 worlds.
 - D. 3 themes here: (1) the mysterious stranger. (2) Imprisonment. (3) Dreams

2. The Mysterious Stranger or “who was that man?”
 - A. Background: After introductory material about Jacob’s favoritism toward J (child of old age, coat of many colors) and Joseph’s dreams which offend his brothers and even Jacob, he is sent to find his brothers.
 - B. In verse 37:15 he meets an unnamed man (ISH) who redirects J from Shechem (Nablus) toward Dothan. There he meets his brothers and the story unfolds.
 - C. This is a narrative detail rarely seen in the Torah (N. Liebowitz).
 - D. NL takes us to the denouement of the story in Parashat Vayigash (45:8). “It was not you that sent me hither but God.”

The Rambam felt that “the Man” was a divine messenger, and therefore, thru the agency of this unnamed man J is properly directed, and ends up in Egypt.

3. Imprisonment
 - A. There are 2 examples of imprisonment in this parashah: (1) the pit, into which he was thrown by the brothers (2) prison, where he was incarcerated after “l’affaire Madame Potiphar.”
 - B. Both of these imprisonments served as important steps in J’s personal journey. The pit brought J out of his father’s house and down to Egypt. The jail established J as an indispensable dream interpretation specialist, and hence valuable to Pharaoh.
 - C. Prison turned out to be a springboard to greatness.
 - D. Don’t you find it interesting that imprisonment is not a traditional Jewish response to crime. The Torah mandates that crimes be remunerated financially or addressed by physical or capital punishment, not by limiting personal liberty. Discuss.

4. Dreams
 - A. The Joseph novella turns on dreams. His dreams early in the parasha about sheaves of wheat and heavenly bodies bowing down to him, aggravating his brothers and even his father. But they turn out to be true portenders of future events.
 - B. The butler’s and baker’s dreams in jail, once they are interpreted, turn out to be true portenders of future events.

- C. Pharoah's double dream of the fat/lean cows and the fat/lean ears of corn, once interpreted, turns out to be a true portender of future events.
- D. Robert Alter asserts that dreams in the Joseph story are more "secular" than the dream/vision we read earlier in Genesis, where the dream contains a direct message from God. Recall Jacob's dream of the ladder.
- E. When J interprets Pharoah's dreams, he indicates that doubling of the dream is a sign that what it portends will really happen. (41:32). "As for Pharoah having the same dream twice, it means that the matter has been determined by God, and that God will soon carry it out."
- F. So we see many double dreams. J has 2, the 2 jailbirds each have one, and Pharoah has 2.
- G. So what does this mean to the modern reader, who does not see dreams as a conduit of divine revelation nor as a portent of future events? Most of us have fallen under Freud's influence, who taught that dreams are an issue of wish fulfillment.
- H. I cannot reconcile this myself. But I keep going back to Ernie Rabinowicz. Joseph was a dream interpretation specialist, very useful in this Egyptian society, for he could foretell the future. Ernie stressed that Joseph didn't stop there, but quickly sketched a job description based on his economic prediction which Pharoah saw as just right for this rehabilitated Hebrew slave. Joseph got the job, our people all came down to Egypt, and you know the rest of the story.

Shabbat Shalom

SPK

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