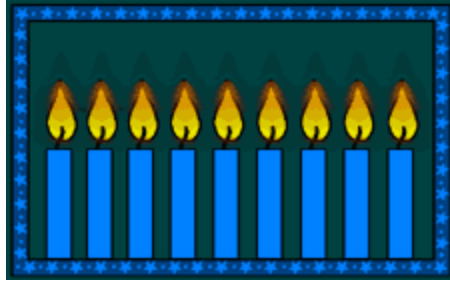


Beth Tephila Messianic Jewish Congregation

(Under same management for over 5779 years)



Chanukah Party

Bring your Chanukia



December 8th – 10:30 AM – Lolo Community "Synagogue"

Dry Bones



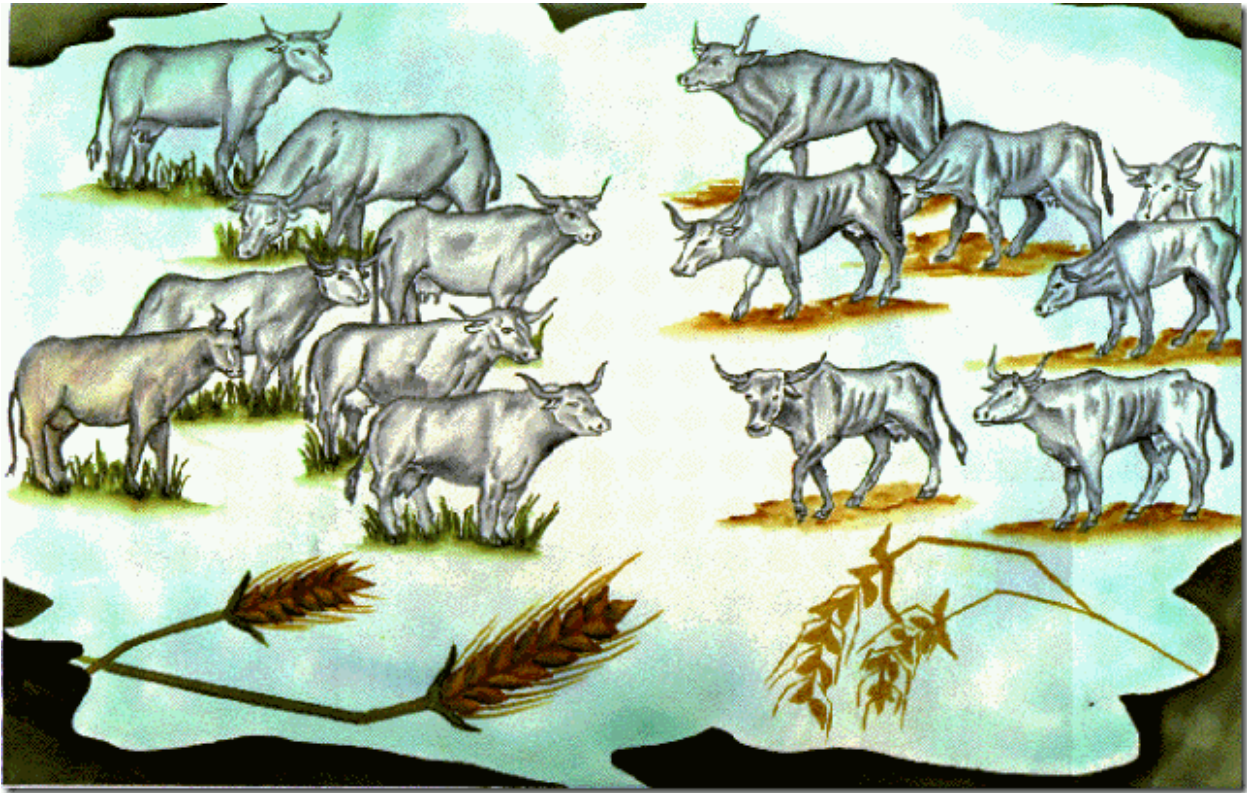
Parshat Miketz

Genesis 41 - 44:17

וַיְהִי בִמְקַץ שְׁנָתַיִם יָמִים וּפְרֹעֹה חֹלֵם וְהִנֵּה עֹמֵד עַל־הַיַּאֲרֹ:

"Vayehi mikets shnatayim yamim uFar'oh cholem vehineh omed al-ha Ye'or".

"And it was at the end of two full years that Pharaoh had a dream, and behold, he was standing by the Nile."



"from the Nile there came up seven cows, sleek and fat..."

"Then behold, seven other cows came up after them from the Nile, ugly and gaunt,"

"And the ugly and gaunt cows ate up the seven sleek and fat cows."

Haftarah: Zechariah 2:8, 3:2 (Jerusalem)

For thus says the Lord of Hosts, "After glory, He has sent me against the nations, which have plundered you, for he who touches you touches the apple of His eye."

And the Lord said to Satan, "The Lord rebuke you, Satan! Indeed, the Lord who has chosen Jerusalem, rebuke you!"

B'rit Chadashah: Revelation 21:2

"And I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God..."

Faith of Jacob: Not by Sight

Joseph, who fore-shadowed Messiah, was rejected by his brothers and sold to evil men. Yet it was through him that his people would be saved, according to the purposes of God. Throughout his ordeal, Joseph remained faithful to God. He was only 17 years old when he was forcibly removed from his elevated state among his brothers and deposited first into the household of Potiphar and then into the Royal prison. At home he was truthful but not very diplomatic in relating his dreams to his father and brothers. In the Royal prison, Joseph was also truthful in interpreting the dreams of the baker and cup bearer, but he gave full credit for the interpretation to God. Yet faithful Joseph still remained in prison. He was 30 years old, when he was finally released from prison (Gen. 41:46). Therefore he endured 13 years of agony, but he kept his faith in God. Unlike Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, God never spoke directly to Joseph. God never comforted Joseph by letting him know that his troubles would soon be over, and he would save his whole family, as a result of being sent to Egypt. Could we have done so? If not, why not? Like Joseph, God does not speak directly to most of us to comfort us or to let us know His immediate plans for us. But unlike Joseph, we have the Ruach Hakodesh within us to comfort us. We have God's words, written just for us, to let us know God's heart. There are believers today who are dying and are in prisons for their faith in God, yet they remain steadfast. The Maccabee clan took up arms against an enemy much stronger than themselves to give their people religious freedom. It is relatively easy to express our faith when things are going well for us. It is quite another thing to live our faith in times of adversity. God was with Joseph in jail and gave him favor with the jailer (Gen. 39:21), but God did not remove Joseph from the prison. The lesson for us today is that God may choose to accomplish His purposes through us, while leaving us in what we might consider less than satisfactory conditions. Yet, like Joseph, we must remain steadfast in our faith and faithful to continue the job God gives us.



Pharaoh had a Dream

Pharaoh's dream was actually two separate dreams having one interpretation. Pharaoh was disturbed ("his spirit was troubled") by his dreams because they involved the three most important things for the preservation of his kingdom: The Nile River, which floods yearly, bringing rich topsoil and water into the canals that irrigate the crops; Corn, symbolizing agriculture; Cattle, symbolizing their meat production. However, his "magicians" and "wise men" were unable to interpret his dreams. One wonders whether they actually tried to interpret his dreams but could not do so to his

satisfaction, or were they too afraid of his wrath to really try. Then, two years after leaving the royal prison, the cupbearer finally remembered that Joseph ("a Hebrew youth" Gen. 41:12) had correctly interpreted his dream. He mentioned this to Pharaoh, using the disparaging term, *na'ar Ivri eved*, "a young, insignificant foreigner, a slave." The generation of World War 1 & 2 might say "Jew boy." It is obvious that the cup bearer is protecting himself by demeaning Joseph just in case Joseph's interpretation displeases Pharaoh.



“Save Me, Obi Wan Kenobi, Only you can save me!”

Joseph asked the Cup bearer to save him two years previously.

At this point one might wonder why God allowed two years to pass before giving Pharaoh these two dreams, while leaving Joseph in prison. Of course we can speculate, but we really do not know the answer. What we do know for sure is that Joseph's faith was surely tested in the two intervening years. Rabbi Jonathan Sacks contributes to our understanding: “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. 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. God is intimately involved in our life.” **We act, making our own choices, but God supersedes**. As Rabbi Sacks puts it, “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.”

Joseph was still in the royal prison awaiting the whim of Pharaoh, either to be executed or released. Therefore one might imagine that Joseph might have been even more reluctant than the court officials to try to interpret Pharaoh's dream. However, the Torah tells us that just the opposite was true. Joseph expressed confidence before Pharaoh, telling him that God would interpret the dreams for him.

You will also note that God's interpretation of Pharaoh's dreams was quite specific....no open-ended generic interpretation, as one might expect from a sorcerer or psychic, trying to "cover his bases." You might also notice that Joseph had no fear telling Pharaoh, who considered himself a god, that God was telling Pharaoh what God was about to do to Pharaoh and to the whole country. Joseph knew that he was elevating his God, the Hebrew God, over Pharaoh and all other Egyptian gods. Jewish interpreters have grappled with a nagging question: Why should Pharaoh have listened to a young Hebrew servant, appointing him to a high office, when his interpretation was but one of many possible explanations? Why should Joseph's interpretation have been more preferable to those of the magicians and wise men of Egypt? Their answer traditionally comes from the Talmud, Bereshit Rabbah. The interpretation of the wise men and magicians was that there were

two separate dreams—the dream about cows pertained to daughters that the Pharaoh would father and later bury, and the dream about the ears of grain referred to provinces that would be conquered by Pharaoh but would later rebel against him. Perhaps a better explanation for Pharaoh believing Joseph's interpretation was that God gave Joseph a simple, straight-forward interpretation with a solution that could be achieved by the right person.



After telling Pharaoh about the years of plenty and years of famine to follow, Joseph proposed to Pharaoh a solution to preserve the kingdom through the years of famine. Naturally, since the interpretation and solution involved events that the God of the Hebrews was about to unleash, Pharaoh needed a "right-hand" man, who was familiar with the Hebrew God. Now who could that be? Joseph was released from prison and became the second most important man in the country to Pharaoh. He was given Pharaoh's symbols of authority, an Egyptian name, an Egyptian wife [Egyptian, how could it be that God would allow righteous Joseph to marry someone, who was not Jewish? Rabbis rehabilitate Joseph's decision to marry Asenath by speculating that she was really the daughter of Dinah; therefore Jewish.] (who bore him two children), and Pharaoh's second chariot in which to ride. During the seven years of plenty, Joseph gathered up food and put it into storage in preparation for the anticipated famine to come. A question not well answered in Jewish writing is: Why, when Joseph had consolidated power in Egypt, did he not attempt to contact his father to let Jacob know he was alive in Egypt? In my opinion, there are no satisfactory answers from Jewish Rabbinic writings that fit the written text and are consistent with God's overall plan to remove His people from the deleterious effects of living proximately to the Canaanites. So, in good Jewish Rabbinic tradition, I too will speculate below.

God's Perspective vs. Joseph's Perspective

The reconciliation of Joseph with his family illustrates for us the difference between God's perspective and ours. In last week's Torah portion we saw examples of the beginning of the corruption of God's people by the influence of the surrounding Canaanite nations. Reuben, the first-born, lay with Bilhah, his father's concubine (Rachael's maid). Judah, through whom Messiah would be born, evidently had the habit of visiting pagan temple prostitutes and was seduced by

Tamar. Canaanite influence was corrupting the family of Jacob, and Jacob seemed to be a passive man, who heard about these events but took no action to prevent their continuation.

From God's perspective, His people had to be removed from Canaanite influence before being assimilated by the Canaanites. God's solution was to prepare Egypt to receive His people. Joseph's captivity and rise to prominence in Egypt was the way God chose to accomplish His plan. During the years of plenty in Egypt, Joseph was consolidating his power and favor with Pharaoh by storing up food. When the famine occurred, Egypt had food to sell, enriching Pharaoh. By the time Jacob and the family arrived, Pharaoh was so pleased with Joseph that he gave Joseph's family sanctuary in the best land of Egypt. Had Joseph informed Jacob that he was alive as soon as he obtained power in Egypt, Jacob would have been greatly relieved, but God's plan to remove the family to Egypt may not have occurred. Passive Jacob may have been content to have Joseph supply him with food from Egypt and remain comfortable living among the Canaanites. God's timing was perfect! Allowing Jacob no knowledge of Joseph until the family in Canaan was starving, gave Jacob the impetus to leave Canaan and bring his family to Egypt.

From Joseph's perspective, though, God's plan was neither pleasant nor apparent. Joseph was "prepared" for God's plan by languishing in a foreign prison for many years, while Jacob thought him dead. Like Joseph, we only see life from our perspective. We see our predicament and wonder why God has allowed such circumstances to befall us. We cannot know God's plan....but we must continue to have faith in God, knowing that we are part of God's plan, and that God's timing is perfect! We must continue to act in His behalf under whatever circumstances God allows. Faith is trusting that God knows best how to accomplish His purposes through us each day, while at the same time looking forward to God's plan for our ultimate deliverance!!

Reconciliation involved both Repentance & Testing

Having achieved the dream of any good Jewish boy....fame and fortune, one would think that Joseph would be quite content to remain "king over all he surveyed." It's been said that Bar Mitzvah is the day a Jewish boy comes to realize that he is more likely to own a professional sports team than to play for one. Well, Joseph owned all the teams in Egypt. Yet he longed for home and family. He named his first son, Manasseh, which means "one who causes to forget" (his troubles and father's household). He named his second son Ephraim, "fruitful," ("double-fruit") because God had made him fruitful "...in the land of his affliction."

In this week's Torah portion, we see the beginning of the family reconciliation by Joseph. Reconciliation involves both repentance and forgiveness as prerequisites. According to Jewish tradition, forgiveness requires **Tephila** (prayer to ascertain God's will), **Teshuvah** (repentance to sublimate our will to God's will), and **Tzedakah** (giving charity), which visibly represents a change of behavior. When Joseph saw his brothers, he had the power over them to exact retribution for the **tsuris** (troubles, grief) they caused him and his father, Jacob. Instead he sought reconciliation, testing them to ascertain if they had truly repented. Repentance is not simply feeling sorry for a previous behavior, but must include a complete change in behavior, so as to preclude a repetition of the previous behavior.

When Joseph noticed that his brothers had come for food, he spoke harshly to them and called them spies. He put them on the defensive, so that they were inwardly focused and did not notice who he was. One can calculate that it had been over 20 years (perhaps as much as 27 years) since they had seen him. He was only 17 years old then. They were bearded, as was their custom, and dressed in shepherds' clothing, speaking Hebrew. He would have been clean-shaven, dressed in garments of the Egyptian nobility, and would have been speaking Egyptian. As they bowed down to him in respect, Joseph remembered his childhood dream that his brothers would bow to him. He tested them to see if their youngest brother, Benjamin, was still alive and well. Joseph wanted to find

out whether they treated Benjamin like they had treated him....with jealousy and disrespect. He had them put into a cistern type prison (42:17), possibly reminding them that had put him into a cistern while deciding what to do with him. Joseph wept as he heard that his brothers had feelings of guilt regarding what they had done to him (42:21-24), but would their feelings translate into changed behavior? Joseph released all of his brothers except Simeon to bring Jacob and their family the much needed grain and then to return to him with their youngest brother, Benjamin. Would the brothers return at their own risk with Benjamin or would they sacrifice Simeon? After returning back home, when the grain had been eaten, they did then return to Egypt for additional grain, bringing with them their youngest brother, Benjamin. (Why do you think Jacob waited until the family had consumed the grain before risking Benjamin to go to Egypt for more?)

To convince their father, whose behavior had been both passive and dysfunctional, that he should allow them to take Benjamin with them to Egypt, Judah had to become surety for Benjamin, stating that had they not delayed, they could have already returned twice. When the brothers arrived in Egypt, Joseph brought his brothers back to his house for a meal. He had them seated according to their ages. (How would an Egyptian monarch know their ages?) He had Benjamin served 5 times as much food as the others. Would the older brothers try to take Benjamin's food? As he let them go to return to Jacob, he secretly had his silver cup put into the grain sack of Benjamin. Then he sent his servant to follow them with the accusation that Benjamin had stolen his cup and would therefore become his slave. Would the brothers be glad to return home without their youngest brother, Benjamin, like they were glad to be rid of Joseph? Stay tuned next week!!

Does God test us today and if so, why? Certainly God knows our hearts. He knows whether we have truly repented, resulting in a change of our former behavior. So why would he have to test us? The answer may be that in His mercy to us, God tests us, so that we might become aware that our behavior has or has not changed. If it has not changed, then we have not truly repented. Knowing that our behavior has not changed gives us another opportunity to truly repent. Has God been testing you, looking for a change in your behavior? It's much easier to yield to God's prompting through the **Ruach** (Spirit) the first time, rather than having to go through test after test or becoming hardened to God's call. Let us resolve to be so sensitive to the still, small voice of the **Ruach** within us that when we "hear His voice," we exercise the faith of Joseph and change our behavior, according to God's plan for our lives.

SHABBAT SHALOM

