

Kol Rina  
An Independent Minyan  
Parashat Miketz  
Shabbat Rosh Chodesh Chanukah  
December 4, 2021 \*\*\* Kislev 30, 5782

Miketz in a Nutshell

[https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article\\_cdo/aid/3213/jewish/Miketz-in-a-Nutshell.htm](https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/3213/jewish/Miketz-in-a-Nutshell.htm)  
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.

Shabbat Chanukah Haftarah

[https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article\\_cdo/aid/3553806/jewish/On-the-Haftarah-The-Daughters-of-Zion-the-Golden-Menorah-and-Joshua-the-High-Priest.htm](https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/3553806/jewish/On-the-Haftarah-The-Daughters-of-Zion-the-Golden-Menorah-and-Joshua-the-High-Priest.htm)  
The haftarah, beginning from Zechariah 2:14, is often read twice during the year: Once the (first) Shabbat of Chanukah, and again on the week of Baahalotecha. The obvious reason for reading this haftarah is because it speaks of a golden menorah and the High Priest. On Chanukah, we celebrate the miracle with the lights of the menorah and finding the oil with the unbroken seal of the High Priest, and the portion of Behaalotecha begins with Aaron the High Priest being instructed with regards to lighting the menorah. This haftarah is prophecy from Zachariah at the end of the Persian exile, just before we returned to Israel to build the Second Temple. But it clearly also refers to us, at the end of this final exile, soon to be building the third and last Temple. In this article, I will mostly discuss how it pertains to our time. The haftarah begins, "Sing and rejoice daughter of Zion, behold I will come and dwell in your midst." The Jewish people here are called "daughter of Zion" and told to rejoice. The haftarah continues with two prophecies—first about Joshua the High Priest, and second about the golden menorah.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

After twenty-two years and many twists and turns, Joseph and his brothers finally meet. We sense the drama of the moment. The last time they had been together, the brothers planned to kill Joseph and eventually sold him as a slave. One of the reasons they did so is that they were angry at his reports about his dreams; he had twice dreamed that his brothers would bow down to him. To them that sounded like hubris, excessive confidence, and conceit.

Hubris is usually punished by nemesis and so it was in Joseph's case. Far from being a ruler, his brothers turned him into a slave. Now, unexpectedly, in this week's parsha, the dreams become reality. The brothers do bow down to him, "their faces to the ground" (Gen. 42:6). It may feel as though the story has reached its end. Instead it turns out to be only the beginning of another story altogether, a tale of sin, repentance and forgiveness. Biblical stories tend to defy narrative conventions.

The reason, though, that the story does not end with the brothers' meeting is that only one person present at the scene, Joseph himself, knows that it is a reunion.

**"As soon as Joseph saw his brothers, he recognised them, but he pretended to be a stranger and spoke harshly to them ... Joseph recognised his brothers, but they did not recognise him" (Gen. 42:7-8).**

There were many reasons they did not recognise him. Many years had passed. They did not know he was in Egypt. They believed he was still a slave, whereas this man was a viceroy. Besides which, he looked like an Egyptian, spoke Egyptian, and had an Egyptian name, Tsofnat Paaneach. Most importantly, though, he was wearing the uniform of an Egyptian of high rank. That had been the sign of Joseph's elevation at the hand of Pharaoh when he interpreted his dreams:

**So Pharaoh said to Joseph, 'I hereby put you in charge of the whole land of Egypt.' Then Pharaoh took his signet ring from his finger and put it on Joseph's finger. He dressed him in robes of fine linen and put a gold chain round his neck. He made him ride in a chariot as his second-in-command, and people shouted before him, "Make way." Thus he put him in charge of the whole land of Egypt. (Gen. 41:41-43)**

We know from Egyptian wall paintings and from archaeological discoveries like Tutankhamen's tomb, how stylised and elaborate were Egyptian robes of office. Different ranks wore different clothes. Early Pharaohs had two headdresses, a

white one to mark the fact that they were kings of upper Egypt, and a red one to signal that they were kings of lower Egypt. Like all uniforms, clothes told a story, or as we say nowadays, “made a statement.” They proclaimed a person’s status. Someone dressed like this Egyptian before whom the brothers had just bowed could not possibly be their long-lost brother Joseph. Except that he was.

This seems like a minor matter. I want in this essay to argue the opposite. It turns out to be a very major matter indeed. The first thing we need to note is that the Torah as a whole, and Genesis in particular, has a way of focusing our attention on a major theme: it presents us with recurring episodes. Robert Alter calls them “type scenes.”[1] There is, for example, the theme of sibling rivalry that appears four times in Genesis: Cain and Abel, Isaac and Ishmael, Jacob and Esau and Joseph and his brothers. There is the theme that occurs three times of the patriarch forced to leave home because of famine, and then realising that he will have to ask his wife to pretend she is his sister for fear that he will be murdered. And there is the theme of finding-future-wife-at-well, which also occurs three times: Rebecca, Rachel and (early in the book of Exodus) Jethro’s daughter Zipporah.

The encounter between Joseph and his brothers is the fifth in a series of stories in which clothes play a key role. The first is Jacob who dresses in Esau’s clothes while bringing his father a meal so that he can take his brother’s blessing in disguise. Second is Joseph’s finely embroidered robe or “coat of many colours,” which the brothers bring back to their father stained in blood, saying that a wild animal must have seized him. Third is the story of Tamar taking off her widow’s dress, covering herself with a veil, and making herself look as if she were a prostitute. Fourth is the robe Joseph leaves in the hands of Potiphar’s wife while escaping her attempt to seduce him. The fifth is the one in today’s parsha in which Pharaoh dresses Joseph as a high-ranking Egyptian, with clothes of linen, a gold chain, and the royal signet ring.

What all five cases have in common is that they facilitate deception. In each case, they bring about a situation in which things are not as they seem. Jacob wears Esau’s clothes because he is worried that his blind father will feel him and realise that the smooth skin does not belong to Esau but to his younger brother. In the end it is not only the texture but also the smell of the clothes that deceives Isaac:

**“Ah, the smell of my son is like the smell of a field the Lord has blessed” (Gen. 27:27).**

**Joseph’s stained robe was produced by the brothers to conceal the fact that they were responsible for Joseph’s disappearance. Jacob “recognised it and said, “It is my son’s robe! A wild animal has devoured him. Joseph has surely been torn to pieces” (Gen. 37:33).**

Tamar's façade as a veiled prostitute was intended to deceive Judah into sleeping with her since she wanted to have a child to "raise up the name" of her dead husband Er. Potiphar's wife used the evidence of Joseph's torn robe to substantiate her claim that he had tried to rape her, a crime of which he was wholly innocent. Lastly, Joseph used the fact that his brothers did not recognise him to set in motion a series of staged events to test whether they were still capable of selling a brother as a slave or whether they had changed.

So the five stories about garments tell a single story: things are not necessarily as they seem. Appearances deceive. It is therefore with a frisson of discovery that we realise that the Hebrew word for garment, b-g-d, is also the Hebrew word for "betrayal," as in the confession formula, Ashamnu, bagadnu, "We have been guilty, we have betrayed."

Is this a mere literary conceit, a way of linking a series of otherwise unconnected stories? Or is there something more fundamental at stake?

It was the nineteenth century Jewish historian Heinrich Graetz who pointed out a fundamental difference between other ancient cultures and Judaism:

**"The pagan perceives the Divine in nature through the medium of the eye, and he becomes conscious of it as something to be looked at. On the other hand, to the Jew who conceives God as being outside of nature and prior to it, the Divine manifests itself through the will and through the medium of the ear . . . The pagan beholds his god, the Jew hears Him; that is, apprehends His will."**[2]

In the twentieth century, literary theorist Erich Auerbach contrasted the literary style of Homer with that of the Hebrew Bible.[3] In Homer's prose we see the play of light on surfaces. The *Odyssey* and *The Iliad* are full of visual descriptions. By contrast, biblical narrative has very few such descriptions. We do not know how tall Abraham was, the colour of Miriam's hair, or anything about Moses' appearance. Visual details are minimal, and are present only when necessary to understand what follows. We are told for example that Joseph was good-looking (Gen. 39:6) only to explain why Potiphar's wife desired him.

The key to the five stories occurs later on in Tanach, in the biblical account of Israel's first two Kings. Saul looked like royalty. He was "head and shoulders above" everyone else (1 Sam. 9:2). He was tall. He had presence. He had the bearing of a King. But he lacked self-confidence. He followed the people rather than leading them. Samuel had to rebuke him with the words, "You may be small in your own eyes but you are Head of the Tribes of Israel." Appearance and reality were opposites. Saul had physical but not moral stature.



The contrast with David was total. When God told Samuel to go to the family of Yishai to find Israel's next King, no one even thought of David, the youngest and shortest of the family. Samuel's first instinct was to choose Eliav who, like Saul, looked the part. But God told him, "Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance but the Lord looks at the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7). Only when we have read all these stories are we able to return to the first story of all in which clothes play a part: the story of Adam and Eve and the forbidden fruit, after eating which they see they are naked. They are ashamed and they make clothes for themselves. That is a story for another occasion but its theme should now be clear. It is about eyes and ears, seeing and listening. Adam and Eve's sin had little to do with fruit, or sex, and everything to do with the fact that they let what they saw override what they had heard.

■ **"Joseph recognised his brothers, but they did not recognise him."** The reason they did not recognise him is that, from the start, they allowed their feelings to be guided by what they saw, the "coat of many colours" that inflamed their envy of their younger brother. Judge by appearances and you will miss the deeper truth about situations and people. You will even miss God Himself, for God cannot be seen, only heard. That is why the primary imperative in Judaism is Shema Yisrael, "Listen, O Israel," and why, when we say the first line of the Shema, we place our hand over our eyes so that we cannot see.

Appearances deceive. Clothes betray. Deeper understanding, whether of God or of human beings, cannot come from appearances. In order to choose between right and wrong, between good and bad – in order to live the moral life – we must make sure not only to look, but also to listen. [1] Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, New York, Basic Books, 1981, 55-78. [2] Heinrich Graetz, *The Structure of Jewish History, and other essays*, New York, Ktav Publishing House, 1975, 68. [3] Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1957, 3-23.

[Living with Longing – Parashat Miketz 5782 by Rabbi Aviva Richman](https://www.hadar.org/torah-collection/mikeitz)

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The story of Yosef and his brothers is one of a shattered, absent family. The Torah doesn't describe Yosef's emotional state in this tumultuous situation, and we are left to wonder about whether he longed to return to his family, and whether his brothers wanted to reunite and make amends. Through the lens of midrash, we see what it is like to live with absence and longing for extended periods of times. Yosef's longing changes his experience of the world, allowing him in the end to recognize his brothers, even while they didn't recognize him. It is this posture of

longing that we can learn the most from, whether in our relationships with others, or with God.

When Yosef's brothers come to buy grain, the Torah records an asymmetry: "Yosef recognized his brothers, but they did not recognize him" (Genesis 42:8). Why this discrepancy? A number of interpretations draw a connection between the act of physical recognition and the mental state of anticipation. We see what we are ready to see. Ramban states this most generally: Yosef recognized his brothers because he was hoping they would come to Egypt; they did not recognize him because they could never have anticipated that he would be the second in command in Egypt.<sup>1</sup> Bekhor Shor offers a more robust frame for this anticipation. Yosef knew that his ancestors turned towards Egypt in times of famine. Avraham had traveled to Egypt in famine (Genesis 12:10), and Yitzhak had intended to (26:2). Yosef was hoping his family would also be drawn to Egypt because of the famine.<sup>2</sup> Introducing this angle of Yosef's anticipation that famine would bring reunification with his family, we might even trace this hope back to the moment when Yosef first interprets Pharaoh's dreams (21:25). A dream that was a nightmare of devastation ahead for Pharaoh simultaneously indicated the possibility of hope for Yosef. Perhaps Yosef recognized his brothers, not only because he had been waiting for them from the time famine struck, but because he had been anticipating their arrival from when he first interpreted Pharaohs' dreams. His intricate plan of building storehouses may be a pretext driven by his desire to lure his brothers into Egypt.<sup>3</sup>

Midrash speaks to Yosef's anticipation of his brothers' arrival due to famine, and the extent to which this hope bore out, almost obsessively, in the structures he created for anyone who came to Egypt to get food.<sup>4</sup> He put guards at every entrance to the city and made them record the name of everyone who came to get food, and their father's name, and he took the time to read all of these notes every day. When he saw his brothers' names, he closed down all storehouses except for one so they would be forced to go there, and asked for them to be sent to him when they came. When they didn't come for three days, he sent seventy strong men to look for them. It's not clear whether these obsessive actions are driven by Yosef's strong desire to see his brothers, or perhaps a fear that they still want to kill him. Either way, we land on a picture where Yosef's brothers have been at the forefront of his mind in such an intense way—of course he recognizes them the moment he sees them.

Midrash tells us that Yosef's brothers were also longing for him, and waiting for an opportune moment to go to Egypt and bring him back home. Yet, they did not recognize him because they were blinded by a narrow sense of who they thought

he was. They last saw him when they sold him as a slave, and they could only imagine finding him as a lowly slave. According to midrash, when they got to Egypt, their first order of priorities was to find Yosef, not to immediately get food. They searched for him in the prostitutes' market, because they thought Yosef would have ended up there as a slave since he was so beautiful. That is where Yosef's seventy messengers finally found them, and took them to Yosef.<sup>5</sup>

When the brothers were brought before Yosef, they did not recognize him because of the limits of their imagination. Yosef, on the other hand, was a person of dreams. As someone attuned to imagining a future different than the present, he was able to anticipate that his brothers might come down to Egypt, and was ready to recognize them when they stood before him.

Yosef and his brothers teach us what we are able to see and do when we long for someone or something that is dear to us. When we walk through the world with that palpable kind of longing, it changes the way we see what is around us. While most would confront the prospect of famine with dread, Yosef sees it as a way to reconnect with his family. He puts structures into place to make it more possible for what he longs for to come true, even as he is not at all assured of results.

This longing and anticipation in the interpersonal realm can translate into longing to be in relationship with God, even as that may feel quite distant or even impossible.<sup>6</sup> In much of our tradition and liturgy, we are fundamentally in a posture of "waiting" vis a vis God, like Yosef waiting for his family. In the Kedushah prayer on Shabbat each week, we name this posture of waiting, saying to God "כי מחכים / אנחנו לך / for we are waiting for you." It is a long wait, and can be quite frustrating if we think the goal is to get past the waiting stage. Waiting can be like it was for Yosef's brothers. We might feel stuck waiting for God, and may never find God if we have too narrow a sense of what God is "supposed to look like." From Yosef, we learn of the power of waiting that is grounded in clarity of purpose and expansive vision.

We may experience distance and longing in many parts of our lives. From the asymmetry of a/recognition in the story of Yosef and his brothers, we learn that we can miss seeing others (or God) when we have too narrow a sense of what they are supposed to look like. How might we take an expansive approach to what we long for, to lean into our longing and anticipation in a way that opens our eyes to new pathways? In the spirit of Hanukkah, we might land on "small" hard-earned miracles that come in the form of stretching the possibilities of our reality, not waiting for a dramatic shift to suddenly appear. Minimally, we, like Yosef, can do the work to create structures to make our dreams more likely to come true. Yosef designs an intricate system to feed a large population in times of famine so that he

can encounter his brothers. Similarly, what we build in our longing—for others, or for God—must inevitably do good, nourishing work. Perhaps this labor of love that feels like only a pretext for trying to encounter something as unattainable as God’s presence is actually the true work that makes that reality come true.  
Shabbat Shalom.

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<sup>1</sup> R. Moshe ben Nahman (13<sup>th</sup> century, Spain), comments to Genesis 42:8: “היה מכירם מדעתו .” שיבאו שם והם לא הכירוהו שלא נתנו לבם שיהיה העבד אשר מכרו לישמעאלים הוא השליט על הארץ.”

<sup>2</sup> R. Yosef from Orleans (12<sup>th</sup> century, France), comments to Genesis 42:7: “כי היה מצפה להם .” שמא יבואו מפני הרעב כי דרכם של אבות לבוא מצרים מפני הרעב.”

<sup>3</sup> It is interesting that Yosef mentions his father’s house when his son, Menashe, is born, before famine strikes (Genesis 41:52). At face value, his naming of Menashe is about forgetting his father’s house, but the act of mentioning his father’s house suggests that his family is actually quite centrally on his mind.

<sup>4</sup> Bereishit Rabbah 91:6: “מה , אכל, יוסף יודע היה שאחיו יורדין למצרים לשבר אכל, מה .” עשה הושיב שומרים על כל הפתחים ואמר להם ראו כל מי שנכנס לשבר אכל כתבו שמו ושם אביו, לערב הביאו פתקים, ועשו כך . כיון שבאו בני יעקב כל אחד ואחד נכנס בשער שלו וכתבו את שמותם, לערב הביאו לו הפתקים, זה קורא ראובן בן יעקב, ואחד קורא שמעון בן יעקב, ואחד לוי, וכן השוערים כל אחד שלו. מיד אמר להם יוסף סתמו את האוצרות ופתחו אוצר אחד, ונתן שמותם לבעל האוצר, ואמר לו ראה כשיבואו האנשים אלו לידך תפש אותם ושגר אותם לפני, עברו שלשת ימים ולא באו, מיד נטל יוסף שבעים גבורים מבית המלך ושגר לבשילם לבקש אותם בשוק.”

<sup>5</sup> The continuation of the same midrash (Bereishit Rabbah 91:6), narrating the actions of Yosef’s seventy gibborim: “הלכו ומצאו אותם בשוק של זונות, ומה טיבן בשוק של זונות, אלא אמרו אחינו .” יוסף יפה תאר ויפה מראה, שמא בקבה הוא. ותפשו אותן והביאום לפני יוסף.”

<sup>6</sup> The theology of absence might carry its own substantive texture. See Hadar Advanced Kollel member Akiva Mattenson’s prize-winning essay, “Out Beyond the Sea: A Theology of Divine Absence,” available here: <https://www.hadar.org/torah-resource/out-beyond-sea>.

### Miketz by Rabbi Shaul Rosenblatt

<https://mailchi.mp/tikun/haazinu5781-2579736?e=e0f2ca6c0d>

This week we read the classical story of Joseph and his brothers. Joseph is appointed second in command in Egypt after interpreting Pharaoh’s dreams. Seven thin cows eating seven fat cows mean seven years of plenty followed by seven years of famine. So, Joseph starts storing grain. Once the famine arrives, Egypt has food and everyone else is starving. Joseph’s brothers, along with the rest of the world, travel to Egypt for food. They don’t recognise Joseph as their brother – it’s been 20 years and he left them as a teenager. He gives them a merry run-around with the sole purpose of encouraging them to take responsibility for the



mistake that they made – which, to their great credit, they do. There is a final confrontation between him and his brothers, however, and the portion ends with a cliff-hanger.

The ten sons of Jacob are confronted by the seemingly merciless Egyptian vizier. He claims they are spies and is unwilling to listen to any argument against. He demands that one of them remain as his prisoner whilst the other nine go and bring their youngest brother from Canaan to prove they are telling the truth. They are in a tight bind and they huddle to compare notes. I am always overawed when I read how they responded.

‘We are guilty for our brother (Joseph), that we witnessed the distress of his soul when he begged us, and we did not listen. That is why this trouble has come upon us.’

I just love it that there is no blame. They don't blame the Egyptian vizier. They don't blame God. They don't blame their upbringing or the teachers that didn't treat them nicely in school. It's not the government's fault either.....instead, they utter those beautiful words – it's on us. We didn't behave properly and so we deserve this. I'm always saddened to see the blame culture that we live in. There is always somewhere else to shift the blame. My child's bad grades are because of the school – not his lack of effort. My failure at work is because of mismanagement by my line manager – not my laziness. My alcoholism is due to the way my father treated me as a child – not choices I have made myself. I am struggling financially because the government has reduced benefits. I'm struggling with depression because my therapist is no good. My relationship is not going well because my wife is unkind.....there is no limit to blame if we wish to look in that direction. And blame is so disempowering. When it's someone else's fault, I am a helpless victim. There is nothing I can do, but feel sorry for myself and complain about the person or institution who is not treating me well. I see this in my kids, I see this in the rabbis on my course and I'd be hypocritical if I didn't say that I see this tendency in myself.

Conversely, it is so incredibly empowering to say, as the brothers did, ‘this is on me.’ I'm not a poor, powerless victim cowering in a corner. I'm an adult who has made wrong decisions and has the ability to reflect and correct. I really love this, and I love doing so myself. I love it that we human beings make mistakes – we wouldn't be human if we didn't. Then I love it that we can take responsibility for those mistakes. And finally, I love it that, in so doing, we get to fix them and move on to bigger and better things in life. This is the process of human growth and development.

Blame stunts this process at step two and so we never get to change.

This week, a man came to speak to my rabbis who had served time in prison for sexual abuse. I really loved his attitude. I was wrong in what I did. I blame only myself. I take

full responsibility for the harm caused to my victim and I am devastated that I did this. I got what I deserved. The time I spent in prison changed me and made me a better person. I am grateful to the justice system for treating me fairly and changing my life for the better.

Blame helps no one. Taking responsibility for our own lives and choices is the only way through which we change and grow.

Joseph's Brothers and the Naked Truth by Howard Markose  
<https://www.jtsa.edu/torah/josephs-brothers-and-the-naked-truth/>

In Parashat Miketz, Jacob sends Joseph's brothers on a mission to procure rations for the family, which is facing starvation in Canaan. The ten sons of Jacob, however, could not have anticipated what was to transpire upon their arrival. An intense interrogation by Egypt's viceroy is followed by three days in detention, the incarceration of Simon, and a demand to bring Benjamin, their youngest brother, to Egypt. The brothers find no relief from their ordeal, and this unrelenting strain manifests itself both in the way they respond to Joseph's questioning, as well as how they retell the incident to their father, Jacob, upon their return to Canaan. We readers are given a detailed account of the brothers' visit as it unfolds, with a focus on the verbal exchange with Joseph. Joseph's manner and words reflect animus towards his brothers as he recalls some very difficult moments in his life. Then, when sharing with their father, Jacob, their account of their experience, the brothers' retelling of what took place in Egypt diverges from what happened earlier in the chapter. The modifications, additions, and omissions are all quite revealing of the mindset of the brothers. It seems to me, reflecting on what might be seen as an innocent omission, that they failed to fully comprehend the harm they had caused Joseph.

When Jacob sends the brothers to fulfill the important task of travelling to Egypt to procure food for the family, he does not recognize that once again, as was the case with Joseph years earlier, his sending sons away would result in having one fewer son present in his household.

Upon reaching Egypt, the brothers' identity becomes immediately known to Joseph:

וַיֵּרָא יוֹסֵף אֶת־אֶחָיו וַיִּכְרַם וַיִּתְנַכֵּר אֵלֵיהֶם וַיְדַבֵּר אֲתָם קָשׁוֹת וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם מֵאֵין בָּאתֶם וַיֹּאמְרוּ מִמִּצְרָיִם  
כְּנַעַן לְשֹׁכְרֵי־אֶקֶל:

*“When Joseph saw his brothers, he recognized them; but he acted like a stranger toward them and spoke harshly to them. He asked them, ‘Where do you come from?’ And they said, ‘From the Land of Canaan, to procure food.’” (Gen. 42:7)*

The brothers answer the question “Where do you come from?” rather tersely, saying, “From the Land of Canaan.” They then offer additional information: “To procure food.” Joseph ignores this claim and accuses them of being spies. But before this accusation, the narrator introduces an internal revelation experienced by Joseph: וַיִּזְכֹּר יוֹסֵף אֶת הַחֲלֻמוֹת אֲשֶׁר חָלַם לָהֶם “And Joseph remembered the dreams that he had dreamed about them” (ibid, v.9).

What exactly did Joseph recall? It seems that Joseph did more than just remember his dreams. Possibly he recalled being doted upon as his father’s favorite, as a result of which his brothers came to hate him and wouldn’t speak a civil word to him. Perhaps he remembered the humiliation he suffered at the hands of his brothers, including when he found them in Dotan and they stripped him of his coat and threw him into a pit in spite of his pleas (ibid, v.21). He very likely thought about how he was drawn from the pit, sold to travelling nomads, brought to Egypt, and sold to Potiphar, a respected dignitary in Pharaoh’s court. And he likely recalled how he became the object of Potiphar’s wife’s sexual interest, resulting in another humiliating scene where he left his clothes in her hands as he ran away to escape her advances.

Note that among the memories connected to his dreams are two incidents in which he had been left naked. It is no wonder that his accusation toward his brothers of being spies is accompanied by his claim that they are looking to “see the nakedness of the land” וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם מִרְגָּלִים אַתֶּם לִרְאוֹת אֶת-עֵרְוַת הָאָרֶץ בְּאַתְּמֶם: “He said to them, ‘You are spies! You have come to see the land in its nakedness!’” (ibid, v.9). Joseph has “nakedness” on the brain, and this accusation against his brothers reflects his mindset.

Joseph’s accusations toward the brothers are presented in the text in a chiasmic formulation (ABBA), which is often used to emphasize the point in the center of the phrase (BB). Joseph accuses his brothers as follows: (v. 9), A – You are spies! B – You have come to see the land in its nakedness! B’ – The nakedness of the land you have come to see! (v.12) A’ – You are spies! (v.14). The chiasmic format reflects that Joseph’s thoughts at this moment are about nakedness and humiliation much more than espionage.

When the brothers share this ordeal with their father upon their return to Canaan, they make no mention whatsoever of this segment of Joseph’s speech, because the emphasis on nakedness simply meant nothing to them. They didn’t relate these words to the fact that they had left their brother naked in a pit near Dotan. And they certainly were not privy to the attempted seduction by Potiphar’s wife, leaving the “nakedness” portion of Joseph’s tirade understandably omitted from their report to Jacob.

When recalling an event, we (as human beings) might retell the story with impressive exactitude, describing all that occurred exactly as it happened or quoting spoken words precisely as they were uttered. More likely, however, we will do our best to recall the details, acknowledging that we may miss a specific or two (or three . . .) in the telling. Sometimes, those omissions are deliberate, perhaps in hopes of avoiding possible discomfort to the listener. At other times, our recollection does not include portions of the event or particular words spoken, simply because they meant nothing to us at the time, and subsequently have no conscious presence when we later attempt to produce details to share. This is what happened to Joseph's brothers, whom I believe did their very best to share their experience with their father honestly and accurately. (*Howard Markose is an Adjunct Assistant Professor of Bible at JTS*)

### Yahrtzeits

- \* Steve Kissner remembers his father Abe Kissner on Tues. Nov. 30 (Kislev 26)
- \* Blossom Primer and Jeremy Primer remember Irwin's mother Sarah Primer on Thurs. Dec. 2 (Kislev 28)
- \* Harriett Hessdorf remembers her father Herbert Achtentuch (David ben Zvi) on Fri. Dec. 3 (Kislev 29), and her mother Miriam Achtentuch (Miriam bat Zissel) whose Yahrzeit is Mon. Dec. 6 (Tevet 2), but Harriett chooses to remember her mother on Sunday evening Dec. 5
- \* Francine Nelson remembers her sister Sara Rapaport Amoni (Sara bat Yehudah Leib haCohen v Idel) on Wed. Dec. 8 (Tevet 4), and her Aunt Esther Miller (Esther Zissel bat Hershel haCohen v Gittel Malka) on Thurs. Dec. 9 (Tevet 5)

### Coming Up At Kol Rina

#### **Chanukah Party at Kol Rina this Sunday!**

*Let's have a party, we'll all dance a hora . . . .* Dig out your Hanukkiah and your dreidels: Kol Rina will be putting on a fun Hanukkah party on Sunday, December 5, featuring a live performance by Sharon Litwinoff. The in-person party will be from 3:30 to 5:30; livestreaming via Zoom will commence at 4:00. The party will also kick off our year of celebrating Kol Rina's 10th year. Put it on your calendar and check the separate mailing that went out earlier this week for further details.

### Sylvia Orenstein second Bat Mitzvah celebration, December 11

The entire community is invited to celebrate with our beloved Sylvia Orenstein on the occasion of her second Bat Mitzvah. The celebration will take place in a Mincha service



on Saturday, December 11 at 3:45 pm at Congregation Beth El. [Click here to RSVP](#) by December 5. For those who prefer to attend via livestream, information on how to connect will be provided closer to the event.

**Next installment of our lecture series by Dr. Ruth Calderon will take place  
December 12**

Dr. Ruth Calderon, Israel's leading secular scholar of Talmudic narrative, will teach her second lesson via Zoom from Israel on Sunday, December 12, beginning at 1:30 PM. Her topic for the second lecture will be "Politics: How the president Rabban Gamliel was removed from office." The series is presented by the Susan Marx Fund for Adult Education at Kol Rina, in cooperation with Congregation Beth Shalom of Bloomington, Indiana and Temple Beth Shalom of Livingston, New Jersey. This is an outstanding opportunity to hear a strikingly original thinker, provided **free of charge** and **open to all**.

To receive the Zoom link, please register on Eventbrite using the following link:  
<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/holiness-seen-and-unseen-3-talmudic-theses-dr-ruth-calderon-3-part-series-tickets-199398896467>