

Parashat Miketz: When Reality Invites You to Play

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Dear Friends,

Years have passed since Yoseph was thrown into jail. He is a leader of prisoners, he is an interpreter of dreams, but he is certain that the world has forgotten about him. If nothing changes, he will rot there for the rest of his life.

And then Pharaoh dreams his two famous dreams, and everything changes. History is about to unfold! Pharaoh is bewildered by his dreams and none of his sorcerers and magicians are able to comfort him. Finally the chief baker, who had previously been imprisoned with Yoseph, and had witnessed Yoseph's dream interpretation first-hand, remembers him. Yoseph's life is about to change completely. From a prisoner wrongly accused, he becomes Pharaoh's second-in-command. He will marry and have two children, and in nine years (still in Parashat Miketz) he will be reunited with his brothers, who will bow down to him exactly as he had dreamed so many years previously.

It is very surprising to me that Pharaoh and his sorcerers are unable to interpret Pharaoh's dreams. The dreams are simple enough and the sorcerers are indeed very skilled (they will one day prove that they too can turn a staff into a serpent!).

As a child, I loved daydreaming. These dreams were a source of sanity and hope when reality around me was less pleasant. Years have passed and I no longer daydream. I don't have time for it. I am too busy with concrete reality. What a shame!

All of the dreams in parashot Vayeshev and Miketz are prophetic – Yoseph's two childhood dreams, the dreams of the two imprisoned servants, and finally, Pharaoh's dreams. All of them come true.

The Egyptian sorcerers, on the other hand, were busy with sorcery and not with prophecy.

My son Yehonatan and I have been rereading the Harry Potter books. They are such a pleasure to read as he sits curled up beside me. This is the third time I am reading all seven books (first, when they came out, second, with Yehonatan last year, and now, with Yehonatan again). I am intrigued by the religiosity and profound spirituality of the books (and no, I am not referring to sorcery!). Several days ago I watched a YouTube clip in which Oprah interviews the author, J.K. Rowling. I was taken by surprise when Rowling said that she does not believe in magic! How can this be? The magic in her books is so convincing! And then she went on to explain that she believes in a person's ability to believe in him or herself, and by doing so change and

improve their life. I thought about it for a long time, and indeed, I realized that the Harry Potter series is not about magic and magicians at all, but rather about human longing, hopes, beliefs, love, bonding, and most importantly, our belief in whom we can be.

The Egyptian sorcerers were way too busy performing magic and spells. The magicians' work is to change reality. For instance, they would try to force rain to fall in years of drought. Yoseph's specialty, on the other hand, is to understand reality, accept it as it is, even honor it, and then work with it. Yoseph never argues with reality – not when he is clothed in the “coat of many colors” that his father isolated him with, not when he is sent to tattle on his brothers, not when he is thrown into the pit, not when he is made a slave, and not when he is imprisoned. In all of these situations Yoseph adapts very quickly, and works WITH the reality with which he is faced. When his brothers stand before him he does not seek revenge, because doing so would be like seeking revenge against reality!

Not that the reality Yoseph sees is all rosy; nor is it all bleak. It is entirely neutral, entirely without judgment. For Yoseph reality is more like an infinite playground, a magical and creative expanse. He is willing to face it and befriend it.

When Pharaoh hears Yoseph's refreshing interpretation he is deeply impressed, possibly even moved. He is tired of the magicians' promises. He is tired of endless, Sisyphean attempts to alter reality. Finally, a young man stands before him, who is smart and life-loving, who teaches him that dreams bring to the forefront a Divine vantage point on how reality may play itself out in the future if the game is played right. Not by denial, not by changing what is, not by despair, but by an invitation to see, envision, and create something totally new, within the boundaries of reality as it is.

This brings us, finally, to miracles and to Chanukah. Our Sages strongly disagreed about miracles. Are they a kind of Divine hocus pocus in which physical reality changes and makes way for different form of reality? The Rambam claims that miracles are built in to the act of Creation, in other words, into reality. He claims that there is absolutely no deviation from reality and from the laws of nature. The potential for change is inherent in the six days of Creation, which the Rambam calls “nature”. **Yoseph simply knows how to see the opportunities that already exist within**, and by observation alone - by seeing what is already inherently there - a better future may unfold.

What we have here this week is a wonderful and exciting invitation to view reality through Yoseph's lenses – not those of magicians or sorcerers, but those of a boy, a youth, a man who is looks reality in the eye and in open wonder asks to see all the

options that are enfolded in every single situation. Yoseph invites us to reexamine our relationship with reality and how best to best play the game of life.

Shabbat Shalom, a very happy Chanuka, and an exciting reality!
Elisha