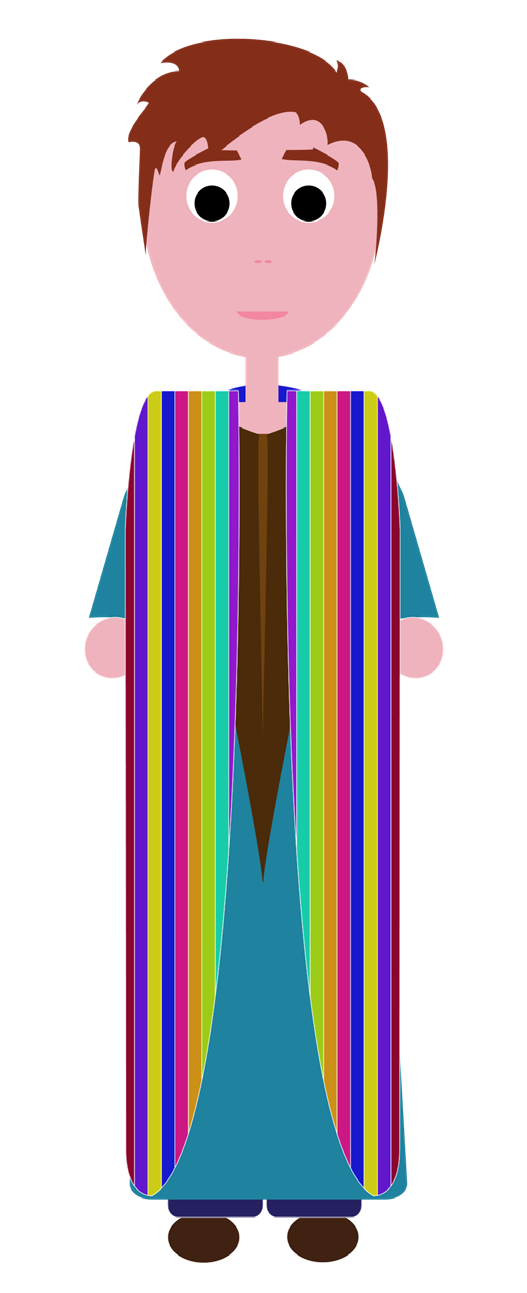


**MIKETZ: DOES GOD SPEAK TO US TODAY? PART II**

Welcome to the Aleph Beta Study Guide to Parshat Miketz!

This guide is the second in a four-part series, which deals with *Parshat Vayeishev* through *Parshat Vayechi*: the whole of the epic Joseph story.

# Picking Up Where We Left Off

In last week’s guide to Parshat *Vayeishev*, we left you with a bit of a puzzle. We were wondering if God ever communicates to us without actually speaking, and we were looking at the Joseph story, hoping that it might serve as a model of this sort of “non-prophetic communication,” as it were. Were there instances in Joseph’s life in which God was speaking to him without *speaking*? We thought that Joseph’s interpretation of Pharaoh’s dreams might be one such instance, and we made the point that there was really only *one* piece of information that Joseph needed in order to interpret the dream: that the cows that Pharaoh was dreaming about represented *years*. Once Joseph had that information, he could piece together the meaning of the whole rest of the dream. But how did Joseph know that key piece of information? How did he know that *cows equaled years*? We raised the possibility that maybe — just maybe — God was able to embed a clue in the dream itself, a clue that only Joseph would understand. But what was the clue?

In order to see it, we’re going to have to back up and return to the beginning of the story of Joseph and Pharaoh. We want to put some intriguing observations on the table, to unearth a pattern in the text and explore what it may mean — for we think *that* is the only way to arrive at an answer.

# Back To The Verses

**Genesis 41:14-15**

**14** And Pharaoh sent and called Joseph, and they

**בראשית מא:יד–טו**

**יד** ַו ִ ּי ׁ ְש ַלח ַּפ ְרעֹה ַו ִ ּי ְק ָרא ֶאת-י ֹו ֵסף, ַו ְי ִרי ֻצהו ִמן-ה ּב ֹור; ַו ְי ַג ַּלח

brought him hastily out of the dungeon. And he shaved

ׂש ְמלֹ ָתיו, ַו ָ ּיבא ֶאל- ּפ ְרעֹה. **טו** ַו ּיֹא ֶמר ַּפ ְרעֹה, ֶאל-י ֹו ֵסף,

ו ְי ַח ֵּלף

himself, and changed his raiment, and he came in unto

פ ֵתר ֵאין אֹת ֹו; ַו ֲא ִני, ׁ ָש ַמ ְע ִּתי ָע ֶליָך ֵלאמֹר,

ַל ְמ ִּתי, ּו ח

חל ֹום

Pharaoh. **15** And Pharaoh said unto Joseph: ‘I have dreamed a dream, and there is none that can interpret it; and I have heard say of thee, that when thou hearest a dream thou canst interpret it.’

ְפ ּתֹר אֹת ֹו. ל

ֹום, חל

ִת ׁ ְש ַמע

**INSTRUCTIONS**

There are a lot of divrei Torah on the parsha. How is this different?

At Aleph Beta, we believe that the Torah is a guidebook that answers life’s biggest questions, offering profound insights about how we should live our lives. Moreover, we believe that Jewish tradition has always recognized the right of all readers, in every generation, to look at the text themselves and try to decide what they think it means. That means you. That’s why you are the most important author of this quest through the sources. We think that this guide offers a fun, stimulating and relevant path through the sources, but if you get wrapped up in a stimulating discussion and never make it past page 2, we’ll consider that a success!

Is this guide for self-study or should I study it with others?

Either works! You can gather a small group of friends to explore it together, share it with a chevruta (learning partner), or go through it by yourself.

Do I need to prepare anything or can I just jump in?

Just jump in! Even if you’re planning to use this for a group discussion, just open up to page 1 and get going. (If you read it in advance, it will spoil the fun!) The only thing you should do in advance is print out copies of the “Source Sheet” for the other participants, so everyone can follow along and engage with the sources.

About the Author

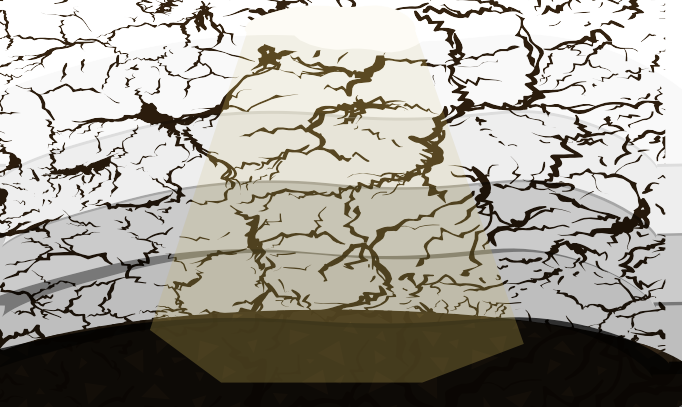
Most of the material within – although not the particular language contained in this guide - was first developed and taught by Rabbi David Fohrman, founder and CEO of Aleph Beta, and is presented in his video, “Parshat Miketz: Does God Speak To Us Today? Part II” (available for viewing at [www.alephbeta.org](http://www.alephbeta.org/)). This guide was written by Beth Lesch, edited by Rivky Stern, and arranged by Laura Schembre.

If you are a Hebrew reader, look closely at verse 14 and ask yourself: Are there any unusual words used here?

How about the word which describes where Joseph was taken from? It is described as ֹור ּב הַ. What does ֹור ּב הַ mean? It’s translated above as “the dungeon,” but literally, it means “the pit.” That’s a strange word to use to describe a jail. (The



Lorem ipsum



more straightforward term for “jail” is ּסֹהַר הַ ּבית — and that,

indeed, is the word that is used throughout the narrative, until this point.) So why does the Torah use this odd turn of phrase, ֹור ּב הַ? Why does it say that Joseph was taken out of a “pit,” when he was really being lifted from a jail? Well, it seems that the text is urging us to remember that there was *another* time when Joseph was in a pit. When was that time?

It was thirteen years earlier, when his brothers threw him into one:

**Genesis 37:23-24**

**בראשית כג**–**כד**

**23** And it came to pass, when Joseph was come unto

ּכאֲ ׁ ֶשר- ָבּא י ֹוסֵף אֶל-אֶ ָחיו; ַו ַ ּיפְ ׁ ִשיט ּו אֶת-י ֹוסֵף אֶת-

**כג** ו ְיהִי,

his brethren, that they stripped Joseph of his coat, the

ֻכּ ָּת ְנ ּת ֹו, אֶת- ְכּתֹ ֶנת הַ ַּפ ִּסים אֲ ׁ ֶשר עָ ָליו. **כד** ו ִ ּי ָּקחֻה ּו--וַ ַ ּי ׁ ְש ִלכ ּו

coat of many colours that was on him; **24** and they took him, and cast him into **the pit**--and **the pit** was empty, there was no water in it.

**ה ּ ֹברָה; ְוהַ ּב ֹור**רֵק, אֵין בּ ֹו מָ ִים

.אֹת ֹו,

How very strange! With these two uses of the unusual word ֹור ּב הַ, it almost seems that the Torah is purposefully *blurring the lines* between these two stories.

But maybe we’re getting ahead of ourselves. Is there anything else about this story with Joseph and Pharaoh that harkens back, mysteriously, to Joseph’s encounter with his brothers at the pit? Well, if you look at Genesis 41:15 above, you’ll see that the next thing to happen in this story with Pharaoh, is that Joseph gets a haircut and a change of clothes. Does that remind you of anything that happened at the pit?

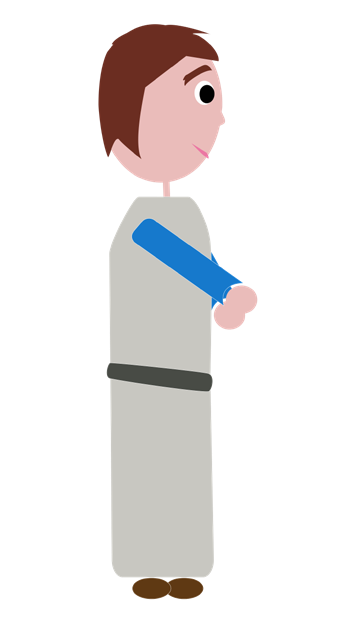
It certainly does:

**Genesis 37:23**

ַו ַ ּי ְפ ׁ ִשיט ּו ֶאת-י ֹו ֵסף ֶאת- ֻכ ָּת ְנ ּת ֹו

They stripped Joseph of his coat

Thirteen years ago, Joseph had his clothes removed and then was thrown into a pit. Now, before Pharaoh, Joseph is pulled out of the “pit” and given a set of nice new clothes.



Not only are we finding these intriguing parallels between the two stories — pit/pit, clothes/clothes — but there’s a real richness to the pattern, for everything is happening in the *reverse* chronological order. At the pit, it was first clothes and then pit. Now, in Egypt, it’s pit and then clothes.

And it’s not just the reverse *chronological* order. The meanings of these events are inversions of one another, too; they are kind of mirror images. What do we mean? Well, the first time around, Joseph’s prized coat was *taken* from him. Now, it’s the opposite: he’s given a beautiful new coat to wear. The first time around, he was *cast into a pit.* Now, the opposite: he is *lifted out.*

It’s intriguing, but... this pattern of reverse chronology and reverse meanings: does it continue? If it does, then we should be able to find more parallels. Let’s see if we can do just that.

# Pit, Clothes, and… ?

In the Egypt story, after Joseph is lifted from the pit and given new clothes, what happens?

**Genesis 41:14**

בא ֶאל- ּפ ְרעֹה.

ו ָ ּי

and he came in unto Pharaoh

Joseph is described as *coming* to this man, this authority figure. What’s the opposite of that? The opposite of “coming to” is “being sent away from.” Does anything like that happen thirteen years prior? Does it ever happen that a man, an authority figure, *sends Joseph away*? Before Joseph was thrown into the pit, before he lost his clothes?

**Genesis 37:13–14**

**בראשית לז:יג–יד**

**13** And Israel said unto Joseph: ‘Do not thy brethren feed the flock in Shechem? come, and I will send thee unto them.’ And he said to him: ‘Here am I.’ **14** And he

הל ֹוא ַא ֶחיָך רֹ ִעים ּב ׁ ְש ֶכם-- ְל ָכה, **יד** ו ּיֹא ֶמר ל ֹו, ֶל ְך-נא ְר ֵאהה ֵּנ ִני.

ה ּצֹאן, ַו ֲה ׁ ִש ֵב ִני, ָ ּד ָבר; **ַו ִ ּי ׁ ְש ָלחֵה ּו**

**יג** ו ּיֹא ֶמר ִי ְׂש ָר ֵאל ֶאל-י ֹו ֵסף,

ו ֶא ׁ ְש ָל ֲחָך ֲא ֵלי ֶהם; ַו ּיֹא ֶמר ל ֹו, ׁשל ֹום ַא ֶחיָך ְו ֶאת- ׁשל ֹום את-

said to him: ‘Go now, see whether it is well with thy brethren, and well with the flock; and bring me back word.’ So **he sent him** out of the vale of Hebron, and he came to Shechem.

בא ׁ ְש ֶכ ָמה.

ח ְבר ֹון, ַו ָ ּי

מ ֵע ֶמק

An authority figure — Pharaoh — calls him in; an authority figure — Jacob — sends him away. The parallels do indeed continue.

And that’s not even the end of it. What is the very next thing to happen *after* Joseph comes before Pharaoh? Pharaoh essentially says to Joseph: “I had this dream, and I need an interpreter - for it is inscrutable, impossible to understand.” In the earlier story of Joseph in the pit — before Joseph’s brothers cast him in, before they strip off his clothes, before his father sends him away — where do we hear about a *dream*? Specifically: a dream whose meaning is so obvious that no one needs to interpret it, because it speaks for itself?

Of course: that’s precisely what we find at the start of the first story:

**Genesis 37:6-7**

ה ָּׂש ֶדה, ְו ִה ֵּנה ָק ָמה ֲא ֻל ָּמ ִתי, ְו ַגם-נ ָ ּצ ָבה; ְו ִה ֵּנה

ֹו ְך ּבת

ִה ֵּנה ֲא ַנ ְחנ ּו ְמ ַא ְּל ִמים ֲא ֻל ִּמים, ח ָל ְמ ִּתי. ְו

ה ֶ ּזה ֲא ׁ ֶשר

ֲחל ֹום ה

ִש ְמע ּו-נא,

ְת ֻס ֶּבי ָנה ֲא ֻל ּמֹ ֵתי ֶכם, ַו ִּת ׁ ְש ַּת ֲח ֶויןָ ַל ֲא ֻל ָּמ ִתי.

‘Hear, I pray you, this dream which I have dreamed: for, behold, we were binding sheaves in the field, and, lo, my sheaf arose, and also stood upright; and, behold, your sheaves came round about, and bowed down to my sheaf.’

**Genesis 37:9**

לי.

כ ֹו ָכ ִבים, ִמ ׁ ְש ַּת ֲח ִוים

ה ׁ ֶּש ֶמ ׁש ְו ַה ָ ּי ֵר ַח ְו ַא ַחד ָע ָׂשר

ֹום ע ֹוד, ְו ִה ֵּנה חל

ַל ְמ ִּתי ח

ה ֵּנה

Behold, I have dreamed yet a dream: and, behold, the sun and the moon and eleven stars bowed down to me.

Joseph had these two dreams — about the sheaves of wheat bowing down; about the sun, moon, and stars bowing down — and their meaning seemed so *obvious*. It’s another reversal: one set of inscrutable dreams, and one set of obvious ones.

In fact, there are other “mirror images” here: in the Joseph and Pharaoh story, how does Pharaoh relate to Joseph? He wants to talk to him about dreams. Thirteen years ago, Jacob didn’t want to hear anything about dreams:

**Genesis 37:10**

ָל ְמ ָּת ח

ה ֶ ּזה ֲא ׁ ֶשר

ֲחל ֹום ה

ו ְי ַס ֵּפר ֶאל-א ִביו, ְו ֶאל-א ָחיו, ַו ִ ּי ְג ַער-ב ֹו ָא ִביו, ַו ּיֹא ֶמר ל ֹו ָמה

And he [Joseph] told it to his father, and to his brethren; and his father rebuked him, and said unto him: ‘What is this dream that thou hast dreamed?

And here is one last intriguing detail. When Pharaoh tells Joseph about his dream, his language is:

**Genesis 41:15**

**ח ַלמְ ִּתי**

**חֲ ל ֹום**

**A dream I have dreamt**

Do you know what Joseph’s language was, thirteen years before?

**Genesis 37:9**

**ָח ַלמְ ִּתחיֲ ל ֹום**

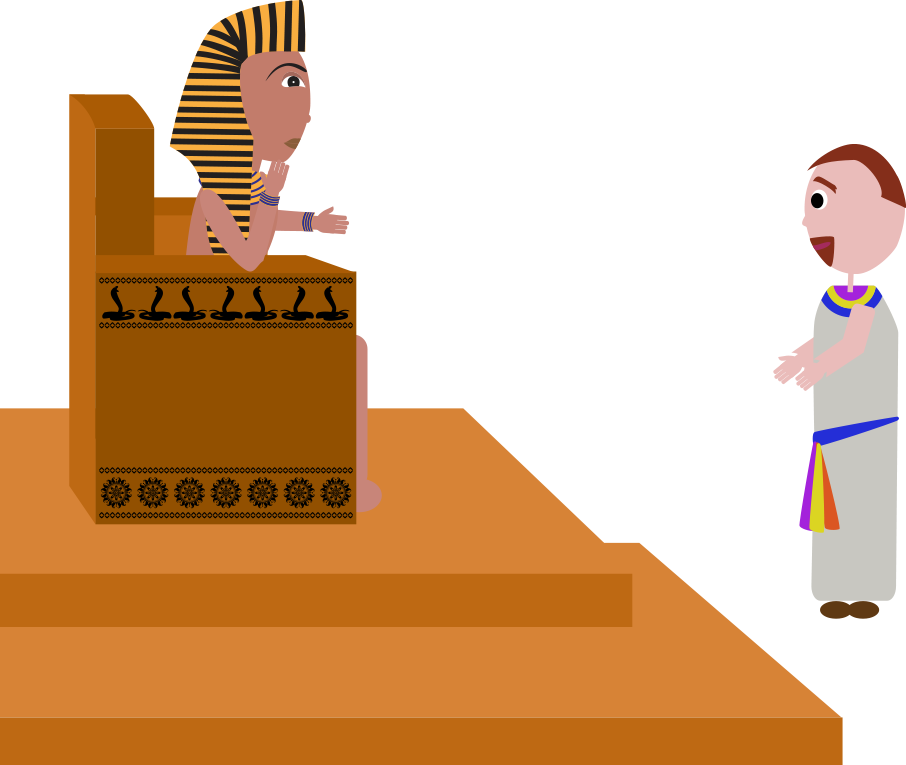
**I dreamt a dream**

It’s the same thing backwards.

# Not A Figment Of Our Imagination

When you add it all up, it doesn’t really seem like a coincidence or a figment of our imagination. The Torah really does seem to be connecting these two stories for us, posing these reverse parallels between them. It seems to suggest that *whatever happened thirteen years ago is being undone now.* Thirteen years ago, everything was falling apart and now, it’s all coming together, it’s all being somehow redeemed.

But what is the point of all of this? It’s all very interesting, this series of parallels between the two stories, but how could it possibly answer our larger question about how Joseph came to interpret Pharaoh’s dreams? About how God might have spoken to Joseph *without really speaking to him*? About how God might speak to us, today?

The answer is: because seeing these parallels is actually going to help us understand what Joseph was thinking and feeling in those moments just before he was asked to interpret the dream: when he was pulled from the pit, given new clothes, and brought close to an authority figure (we might even go so far as to say a “father figure”). To understand what Joseph was thinking and feeling

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in those moments — that, arguably, is a most crucial context for understanding *how* Joseph arrived at

his interpretation. For isn’t it at least *plausible* that Joseph, in that very moment, was aware of the *déjà vu* which we see playing out, that he was suddenly and acutely carried back to his own, troubling, memories from thirteen years earlier? Those memories of the *original* pit, the *original* clothes, the *original* father figure? Isn’t it possible that there was something in Joseph’s earlier experience which prepared him for

decoding Pharaoh’s inscrutable dreams? That God is actually *leading* Joseph to an understanding of what Pharaoh’s dream means by *pointing* him back in time to Joseph’s own experience? And for that to be true — and, we’ll admit, it seems like a pretty wild theory — here’s what we would expect to find: that the parallels will continue. That some aspect of Pharaoh’s dreams themselves will find an echo in Joseph’s original dreams — and that Joseph will parlay that echo into a full-throated dream interpretation.

If so, then we may well find that, as Pharaoh begins to tell Joseph his dream, God is playing that little dinner table game that we described in last week’s guide, communicating aloud with Joseph but in a way that no one else can hear. We’re almost ready to see it, but we have just a few important elements of this parallel left to unveil. That unveiling is precisely what we will do in the guide to *Parshat Vayigash*; stay tuned.



Miketz: Does God Speak To Us Today? Part II

Source Sheet Page1

**Genesis 41:1-32**

**בראשית מא:א–לב**

**1** And it came to pass at the end of two full years, that

ו ַפ ְר ֹעה חֹ ֵלם, ְו ִה ֵּנה עֹ ֵמד על-ה ְיאֹר. **ב**

**א** ַו ְי ִהי, מ ֵּקץ ׁ ְש ָנ ַת ִים ָי ִמים;

Pharaoh dreamed: and, behold, he stood by the river. **2**

ָפר ֹות, ְיפות מ ְר ֶאה, ו ְב ִריאֹת ּב ָׂשר;

ו ִה ֵּנה מן-ה ְיאֹר, עֹלֹת ׁ ֶש ַבע

And, behold, there came up out of the river seven kine,

ֹות, עֹל ֹות א ֲח ֵרי ֶהן מן- א ֵחר

ו ִּת ְר ֶעי ָנה, ּב ָאחו. **ג** ְו ִה ֵּנה ׁ ֶש ַבע ָפר ֹות

well-favoured and fat-fleshed; and they fed in the reed-

grass. **3** And, behold, seven other kine came up after

על- ְׂש ַפת

ָּפר ֹות, ה

ּב ָׂשר; ַו ַּת ֲעמֹ ְד ָנה א ֶצל

ה ְיאֹר, ָרע ֹות מ ְר ֶאה, ְו ַד ּק ֹות

them out of the river, ill favoured and lean-fleshed; and

ה ַּמ ְר ֶאה ְו ַד ּקֹת ה ָּב ָׂשר, את ׁ ֶש ַבע

הַ ְיאֹר. **ד** ַו ּתֹא ַכ ְל ָנה ה ָּפר ֹות, ָרע ֹות

stood by the other kine upon the brink of the river. **4**

ַפ ְרעֹה. **ה** וַ ִ ּיי ׁ ָשן, וַ ַ ּי ֲחלֹם

ה ָּפר ֹות, ְיפת ה ַּמ ְר ֶאה ְו ַה ְּב ִריאֹת; ַו ִ ּיי ַקץ,

And the ill-favoured and lean-fleshed kine did eat up the

ָחד-- ְב ִריאות ְוטֹב ֹות. **ו** א

ָק ֶנה ּב

ֵש ִנית; ְו ִה ֵּנה ׁ ֶש ַבע ׁ ִש ֳּב ִלים, עֹל ֹות

seven well-favoured and fat kine. So Pharaoh awoke. **5**

פת ָק ִדים--צֹ ְמחות, א ֲח ֵרי ֶהן. **ז**

ו ִה ֵּנה ׁ ֶש ַבע ׁ ִש ֳּב ִלים, ַ ּד ּק ֹות ו ׁ ְשד ּו

And he slept and dreamed a second time: and, behold,

ה ׁ ִּש ֳּב ִלים, ה ְּב ִריאות

ה ׁ ִּש ֳּב ִלים ה ַ ּד ּק ֹות, את ׁ ֶש ַבע

ו ִּת ְב ַל ְע ָנה,

seven ears of corn came up upon one stalk, rank and

ַפ ְרעֹה, ְו ִה ֵּנה חל ֹום. **ח** ַו ְי ִהי ב ּ ֹב ֶקר, ַו ִּת ָּפ ֶעם ר ּוחו,

ו ַה ְּמ ֵלאות; ַו ִ ּיי ַקץ

good. **6** And, behold, seven ears, thin and blasted with

the east wind, sprung up after them. **7** And the thin ears

ו ִ ּי ׁ ְש ַלח ַו ִ ּי ְק ָרא את- ָכל-ח ְר ֻט ֵּמי מ ְצ ַר ִים, ְו ֶאת- ָכל-ח ָכ ֶמי ָה; ַו ְי ַס ֵּפר

swallowed up the seven rank and full ears. And Pharaoh

ל ֶהם את-חלֹמ ֹו, ְו ֵאין-פ ֹו ֵתר או ָתם ל ַפ ְר ֹעה. **ט** ַו ְי ַד ֵּברׂשר

ַפ ְרעֹה

awoke, and, behold, it was a dream. **8** And it came to

את- ּפ ְר ֹעה לאמֹר: את-ח ָט ַאי, א ִני מ ְז ִּכיר ה ּי ֹום. **י** ַפ ְרעֹה,

ה ַּמ ׁ ְש ִקים,

pass in the morning that his spirit was troubled; and he

ָּב ִחים--אֹ ִתי, ְו ֵאת ה ַּט

ׂשר

ּבית

ּב ִמ ׁ ְש ַמר,

על-ע ָב ָדיו; ַו ִ ּי ֵּתן אֹ ִתי

ק ַצף

sent and called for all the magicians of Egypt, and all the

ָוהוא: אי ׁש ּכ ִפ ְתר ֹון א ִני

ְי ָלה א ָחד, ּב ַל

ֹום חל

ׂשר הָאֹ ִפים. **יא** ַו ַּנ ַח ְל ָמה

wise men thereof; and Pharaoh told them his dream; but

ע ְב ִרי, ע ֶבד ל ַׂשר ה ַּט ָּב ִחים, ַו ְּנ ַס ֶּפר-

חֲלֹמ ֹו, חָ ָל ְמנ ּו. **יב** ְו ׁ ָשם א ָּתנ ּו ַנ ַער

there was none that could interpret them unto Pharaoh.

ָפ ָתר. **יג** ַו ְי ִהי ּכ ֲא ׁ ֶשר

ֵתינ ּו: אי ׁש ּכ ֲחלֹמ ֹו, את-חלֹמֹ

ל ֹו, ַו ִ ּי ְפ ָּתר- ָלנ ּו

**9** Then spoke the chief butler unto Pharaoh, saying: ‘I

make mention of my faults this day: **10** Pharaoh was

ה ׁ ִשיב על- ַכ ִּני, ְואֹת ֹו ת ָלה. **יד** ַו ִ ּי ׁ ְש ַלח ַפ ְרעֹה

ָפ ַתר- ָלנ ּו, ּכן ה ָיה: אֹ ִתי

wroth with his servants, and put me in the ward of the house of the captain of the guard, me and the chief baker. **11** And we dreamed a dream in one night, I and he; we

מן-ה ּב ֹור; ַו ְי ַג ַּלח ַו ְי ַח ֵּלףׂש ְמלֹ ָתיו, ַו ָ ּיבא אל-

ֹו ֵסף, חל ֹום ח ַל ְמ ִּתי, ופ ֵתר אין אֹת ֹו; חל ֹום, ל ְפ ּתֹר אֹת ֹו. **טז** ַו ַ ּי ַען י ֹו ֵסף אל-י ִת ׁ ְש ַמע

ו ִ ּי ְק ָרא את-י ֹו ֵסף, ַו ְי ִרי ֻצהו

ַפרְ ֹעה. **טו** ַו ּיֹא ֶמר ַפ ְרעֹה,

ו ֲא ִני, ׁ ָש ַמ ְע ִּתי ע ֶליָך לאמֹר,

dreamed each man according to the interpretation of his

את- ׁ ְשל ֹום ַפ ְרעֹה. **יז** ַו ְידַ ֵּבר

ַי ֲע ֶנה אלֹקים,

ָע ָדי: ּב ְל

את- ַּפ ְר ֹעה לאמֹר,

dream. **12** And there was with us there a young man, a

ה ְנ ִני עֹ ֵמד על- ְׂש ַפת ה ְיאֹר. **יח** ְו ִה ֵּנה מִן-

ֲחלֹ ִמי, ּב

ַפ ְר ֹעה, אל-י ֹו ֵסף:

Hebrew, servant to the captain of the guard; and we told

ּב ָׂשר, ִויפת תֹ ַאר; ַו ִּת ְר ֶעי ָנה, ּב ָאחו.

ה ְיאֹר, ֹעלֹת ׁ ֶש ַבע ָפר ֹות, ּב ִריאות

him, and he interpreted to us our dreams; to each man according to his dream he did interpret. **13** And it came to pass, as he interpreted to us, so it was: I was restored

א ֲח ֵרי ֶהן, ַ ּד ּל ֹות ְו ָרע ֹות תֹ ַאר

ָכל-א ֶרץ מ ְצ ַר ִים, לרֹ ַע. **כ** ּב

**יט** ְו ִה ֵּנה ׁ ֶש ַבע- ּפר ֹות א ֵחר ֹות, עֹל ֹות

מאֹד, ְו ַר ּק ֹות ּב ָׂשר: לֹא-ר ִאי ִתי כ ֵה ָּנה

unto mine office, and he was hanged.’ **14** Then Pharaoh

ִרא ׁשֹנ ֹות, ה

ָּפר ֹות ה

ה ַר ּק ֹות, ְו ָה ָרע ֹות--את ׁ ֶש ַבע

ָּפר ֹות, ה

ו ּתֹא ַכ ְל ָנה,

sent and called Joseph, and they brought him hastily out

ְר ֶּב ָנה, אל-ק

ּכי-באו

ְר ֶּב ָנה, ְולֹא נ ֹו ַדע אל-ק

באנה

ה ְּברִיאֹת. **כא** ַו ָּת

of the dungeon. And he shaved himself, and changed his raiment, and came in unto Pharaoh. **15** And Pharaoh said unto Joseph: ‘I have dreamed a dream, and there is none that can interpret it; and I have heard say of thee, that when thou hearest a dream thou canst interpret it.’ **16** And Joseph answered Pharaoh, saying: ‘It is not in me; God will

ו ַמ ְר ֵאי ֶהן ַרע, ּכ ֲא ׁ ֶשר ּב ְּת ִח ָּלה; ָו ִאי ָקץ. **כב** ָו ֵא ֶרא, ּב ֲחלֹ ִמי; ְו ִה ֵּנה ׁ ֶש ַבע

ִש ֳּב ִלים, ֹעלֹת ּב ָק ֶנה א ָחד--מ ֵלאֹת ְוטֹב ֹות. **כג** ְו ִה ֵּנה ׁ ֶש ַבע ׁ ִש ֳּב ִלים,

צ ֻנמ ֹות ַ ּד ּק ֹות ׁ ְש ֻדפות ָק ִדים--צֹ ְמחות, א ֲח ֵרי ֶהם. **כד** ַו ִּת ְב ַלעְןָ

ה ׁ ִּש ֳּב ִלים ה ַ ּד ּקֹת, את ׁ ֶש ַבע ה ׁ ִּש ֳּב ִלים ה ּטֹב ֹות; ָואֹ ַמר, אל-ה ַח ְר ֻט ִּמים,

ו ֵאין מ ִּגיד, לי. **כה** ַו ּיֹא ֶמר י ֹו ֵסף אל- ּפ ְר ֹעה, חל ֹום ַפ ְר ֹעה א ָחד הוא:

give Pharaoh an answer of peace.’ **17** And Pharaoh spoke

בת, ׁ ֶש ַבע

ה ּ ֹט

ָפרֹת

ל ַפ ְרעֹה. **כו** ׁ ֶש ַבע

ִּגיד ה

ה ֱאלֹקים עֹ ֶׂשה,

את א ׁ ֶשר



Miketz: Does God Speak To Us Today? Part II

Source Sheet Page 2

unto Joseph: ‘In my dream, behold, I stood upon the brink

ָחד א

ֹום, חל

ה ָּנה:

בת, ׁ ֶש ַבע ׁ ָש ִנים

ה ּ ֹט

ה ׁ ִּש ֳּב ִלים

ה ָּנה, ְו ׁ ֶש ַבע

ָש ִנים

of the river. **18** And, behold, there came up out of the river

א ֲח ֵרי ֶהן, ׁ ֶש ַבע

העֹלֹת

ּק ֹות ְו ָה ָרעֹת ה ַר

ָּפר ֹות ה

הוא. **כז** ְו ׁ ֶש ַבע

seven kine, fat-fleshed and well-favoured; and they fed in

ה ֵרקות, ׁ ְש ֻדפות ה ָּק ִדים-- ִי ְהי ּו, ׁ ֶש ַבע

ה ׁ ִּש ֳּב ִלים

ָש ִנים ה ָּנה, ְו ׁ ֶש ַבע

the reed-grass. **19** And, behold, seven other kine came up

א ׁ ֶשר ִ ּד ַּב ְר ִּתי אל- ּפ ְר ֹעה: א ׁ ֶשר ה ֱאלֹקים

ְש ֵנירָ ָעב. **כח** הוא ה ָ ּד ָבר,

after them, poor and very ill-favoured and lean-fleshed,

ה ְר ָאה את- ּפ ְר ֹעה. **כט** ה ֵּנה ׁ ֶש ַבע ׁ ָש ִנים, ּבאות-- ָׂש ָבע ָּגד ֹול,

עֹ ֶׂשה,

such as I never saw in all the land of Egypt for badness.

**20** And the lean and ill-favoured kine did eat up the first

ּב ָכל-א ֶרץ מ ְצ ָר ִים. **ל** ְו ָקמ ּו ׁ ֶש ַבע ׁ ְש ֵני ָר ָעב, א ֲח ֵרי ֶהן, ְו ִנ ׁ ְש ַּכח ּכל-

seven fat kine. **21** And when they had eaten them up, it

ּב ֶא ֶרץ מ ְצ ָר ִים; ְו ִכ ָּלה ה ָר ָעב, את-ה ָא ֶרץ. **לא** ְולֹא-י ָ ּו ַדע

ה ָּׂש ָבע,

could not be known that they had eaten them; but they

מאֹד.

ֵבד הוא, ּכי-כ

ֲח ֵרי-כן: א

ההוא

ָר ָעב ה

ְּפ ֵני מ

ָא ֶרץ, ּב

ה ָּׂש ָבע

were still ill-favoured as at the beginning. So I awoke. **22**

מ ִעם

ה ָ ּד ָבר

ָמ ִים-- ִכי-נכ ֹון ַפ ֲע

ּפ ְרעֹה, אל-

ֲחל ֹום ה

ה ׁ ָּשנ ֹות

**לב** ְו ַעל

And I saw in my dream, and, behold, seven ears came up upon one stalk, full and good. **23** And, behold, seven ears, withered, thin, and blasted with the east wind, sprung up after them. **24** And the thin ears swallowed up the seven good ears. And I told it unto the magicians; but there was none that could declare it to me.’ **25** And Joseph said unto Pharaoh: ‘The dream of Pharaoh is one; what God is about to do He has declared unto Pharaoh. **26** The seven good kine are seven years; and the seven good ears are seven years: the dream is one**. 27** And the seven lean and ill-favoured kine that came up after them are seven years, and also the seven empty ears blasted with the east wind; they shall be seven years of famine. **28** That is the thing which I spoke unto Pharaoh: what God is about to do He has shown unto Pharaoh. **29** Behold, there come seven years of great plenty throughout all the land of Egypt. **30**

And there shall arise after them seven years of famine; and

all the plenty shall be forgotten in the land of Egypt; and the famine shall consume the land; **31** and the plenty shall not be known in the land by reason of that famine which followeth; for it shall be very grievous. **32** And for that the dream was doubled unto Pharaoh twice, it is because the thing is established by God, and God will shortly bring it to pass.

ל ֲעׂשֹת ֹו.

ְמ ַמהֵר הָ ֱאלֹקים ו

הָ ֱאלֹקים,

**Genesis 37:23-24**

### בראשית כג–כד

**23** And it came to pass, when Joseph was come unto his

אל-א ָחיו; ַו ַ ּי ְפ ׁ ִשיט ּו את-י ֹו ֵסף את- ֻכ ָּת ְנ ּת ֹו,

**כג** ו ְי ִהי, ּכ ֲא ׁ ֶשר- ָבא י ֹו ֵסף

brethren, that they stripped Joseph of his coat, the coat of many colours that was on him; **24** and they took him, and cast him into the pit--and the pit was empty, there was no water in it.

ו ִ ּי ָּק ֻחהו--ו ַ ּי ׁ ְש ִלכ ּו אֹת ֹו, ה ּ ֹב ָרה;

ע ָליו. **כד**

את- ְכתֹ ֶנת ה ַּפ ִּסים א ׁ ֶשר

ו ַה ּב ֹור ֵרק, אין ב ֹו מ ִים.



Miketz: Does God Speak To Us Today? Part II

Source Sheet Page 3

**Genesis 37:13–14**

### בראשית לז:יג–יד

**13** And Israel said unto Joseph: ‘Do not thy brethren feed

א ֶחיָך רֹ ִעים ּב ׁ ְש ֶכם-- ְל ָכה,

ֹוא הל

**יג** ו ּיֹא ֶמר ִי ְׂש ָר ֵאל אל-י ֹו ֵסף,

the flock in Shechem? come, and I will send thee unto

ֶמר ל ֹו, ל ְך-נא ְר ֵאה את- ו ּיֹא

ֶהם; ַו ּיֹא ֶמר ל ֹו, ה ֵּנ ִני. **יד** א ֵלי

ו ֶא ׁ ְש ָל ֲחָך

them.’ And he said to him: ‘Here am I.’ **14** And he said to him: ‘Go now, see whether it is well with thy brethren, and well with the flock; and bring me back word.’ So he sent him out of the vale of Hebron, and he came to Shechem.

ֵע ֶמק מ

ה ּצֹאן, ַו ֲה ׁ ִש ֵב ִני, ָ ּד ָבר; ַו ִ ּי ׁ ְש ָל ֵחהו

ְשל ֹום א ֶחיָך ְו ֶאת- ׁשל ֹום

ח ְבר ֹון, ַו ָ ּיבא ׁ ְש ֶכ ָמה.

**Genesis 37:5-10**

### בראשית לז:ה–י

**5** And Joseph dreamed a dream, and he told it to his

ל ֶא ָחיו; ַו ּי ֹו ִספו ע ֹוד,ׂש ֹנא אֹת ֹו. **ו** ַו ּיֹאמֶר,

**ה** ַו ַ ּי ֲחלֹם י ֹו ֵסף חל ֹום, ַו ַ ּי ֵּגד

brethren; and they hated him yet the more. **6** And he said

ִש ְמע ּו-נא, ה ֲחל ֹום ה ֶ ּזה א ׁ ֶשר ח ָל ְמ ִּתי. **ז** ְו ִה ֵּנה א ַנ ְחנ ּו

א ֵלי ֶהם:

unto them: ‘Hear, I pray you, this dream which I have

א ֻל ִּמים, ּבת ֹו ְך ה ָּׂש ֶדה, ְו ִה ֵּנה ָק ָמה א ֻל ָּמ ִתי, ְו ַגם-נ ָ ּצ ָבה;

מ ַא ְּל ִמים

dreamed: **7** for, behold, we were binding sheaves in the field, and, lo, my sheaf arose, and also stood upright; and, behold, your sheaves came round about, and bowed down to my sheaf.’ **8** And his brethren said to him: ‘Shalt

ו ִה ֵּנה ת ֻס ֶּבי ָנה א ֻל ּמֹ ֵתי ֶכם, ַו ִּת ׁ ְש ַּת ֲח ֶויןָ ַל ֲא ֻל ָּמ ִתי. **ח** ַו ּיֹא ְמר ּו ל ֹו, א ָחיו,

ֹו ה ָמלֹ ְך ִת ְמלֹ ְך ע ֵלינ ּו, אם-מ ׁש ֹול ִת ְמ ׁשֹל ּבנ ּו; ַו ּי ֹו ִספו ע ֹודׂש ֹנא אֹת ֹו, על-חלֹמֹ ָתיו ְו ַעל- ְ ּד ָב ָריו. **ט** ַו ַ ּי ֲחלֹם ע ֹוד חל ֹום א ֵחר, ַו ְי ַס ֵּפר אֹת

thou indeed reign over us? or shalt thou indeed have

ה ׁ ֶּש ֶמ ׁש ְו ַה ָ ּי ֵר ַח ְו ַא ַחד

ֹום ע ֹוד, ְו ִה ֵּנה חל

ַל ְמ ִּתי ח

ֵּנה ה

ל ֶא ָחיו; ַו ּיֹא ֶמר,

dominion over us?’ And they hated him yet the more for his

ו ְי ַס ֵּפר אל-א ִביו, ְו ֶאל-א ָחיו, ַו ִ ּי ְג ַער-

מ ׁ ְש ַּת ֲח ִוים לי. **י**

ע ָׂשר כ ֹו ָכ ִבים,

dreams, and for his words. **9** And he dreamed yet another

א ׁ ֶשר ח ָל ְמ ָּת: הב ֹוא ָנב ֹוא, א ִני

ה ֲחל ֹום ה ֶ ּזה

ב ֹו א ִביו, ַו ּיֹא ֶמר ל ֹו מה

dream, and told it to his brethren, and said: ‘Behold, I have dreamed yet a dream: and, behold, the sun and the moon and eleven stars bowed down to me.’ **10** And he told it

to his father, and to his brethren; and his father rebuked him, and said unto him: ‘What is this dream that thou hast dreamed? Shall I and thy mother and thy brethren indeed come to bow down to thee to the earth?’

ְר ָצה. א

לָך,

ו ִא ְּמָך ְו ַא ֶחיָך, ל ִה ׁ ְש ַּת ֲח ֹות



**MIKETZ: WHY DIDN’T JOSEPH WRITE HOME?**

Welcome to the Aleph Beta Study Guide to Parshat Miketz!

Parshat Miketz gives rise to one of the greatest questions that you can ask about the whole Book of Genesis: *Why didn’t Joseph write home to his father?*

Let’s take a step back and explain *why* this is such a big question. We know that at age seventeen, Joseph was sold into slavery, and he ends up spending over a decade in prison in Egypt. It doesn’t appear that he tries to reach out to his father at all during that time. But then again, we wouldn’t expect him to. It’s not as if he could just drop a letter in the mail at the Goshen Post Office. As a prisoner in ancient Egypt, Joseph has no telephone and no freedom of movement.

But by the time we are re-acquainted with Joseph at the beginning of our parsha, it’s a different story entirely. Now he’s second in command to Pharaoh, lording over the whole land of Egypt. His fortunes have turned fantastically, and, from his position of power, he can do pretty much whatever he likes. Wouldn’t we expect that he would try to reach out to his father? He could send envoys to the land of Canaan, he could make a visit himself. If he really loves Jacob, why doesn’t he at least write him a postcard?



But strangely, Joseph never reaches out. Why is that?

To make sense of this, we’re going to have to take a careful look at the Joseph story from Joseph’s *own* perspective. One of the challenges that we face as readers of the Bible is to understand that we may know more about the story than any of the individuals actually involved in that story. So for us to really inhabit Joseph’s mind, we’re going to have to ask ourselves: what do *we* know that *Joseph* doesn’t know, and how does realizing this change the way that we understand the story?1

If we can get inside of Joseph’s mind and begin to see things from his perspective, it will shed a great deal of light on our question about why he never wrote home.

1 This line of questioning was inspired by an article in the first issue of Megadim, an Israel-based Tanakh journal, which contains an extended debate on this topic between Rav Yaakov Medan and Rav Yoel Bin-Nun.

**INSTRUCTIONS**

There are a lot of divrei Torah on the parsha. How is this different?

At Aleph Beta, we believe that the Torah is a guidebook that answers life’s biggest questions, offering profound insights about how we should live our lives. Moreover, we believe that Jewish tradition has always recognized the right of all readers, in every generation, to look at the text themselves and try to decide what they think it means. That means you. That’s why you are the most important author of this quest through the sources. We think that this guide offers a fun, stimulating and relevant path through the sources, but if you get wrapped up in a stimulating discussion and never make it past page 2, we’ll consider that a success!

Is this guide for self-study or should I study it with others?

Either works! You can gather a small group of friends to explore it together, share it with a chevruta (learning partner), or go through it by yourself.

Do I need to prepare anything or can I just jump in?

Just jump in! Even if you’re planning to use this for a group discussion, just open up to page 1 and get going. (If you read it in advance, it will spoil the fun!) The only thing you should do in advance is print out copies of the “Source Sheet” for the other participants, so everyone can follow along and engage with the sources.

About the Author

Most of the material within – although not the particular language contained in this guide - was first developed and taught by Rabbi David Fohrman, founder and CEO of Aleph Beta, and is presented in his video, “Parshat Miketz: Why Didn’t Joseph Write Home?” (available for viewing at www.alephbeta.org). This guide was written by Ami Silver, edited by Rivky Stern and Beth Lesch, and arranged by Laura Schembre.

# What Does Joseph Know?

To get started, we’ll need to go back earlier, to the start of the Joseph saga. That is where our story really begins. Our guiding question is going to be: what does Joseph actually know about what transpired?

He knows that when he was seventeen years old, he had this dream that seemed to portend that he would rise to a position of power. He told the dream to his brothers,

and they became jealous of him. Then, he had a second dream, which he told to his  brothers, and now, also, to his father. Now, Jacob had always loved Joseph; he even

made him a special coat as a sign of his affection. But when Jacob hears Joseph’s  dream, he gets angry at Joseph. He castigates him, and says, “What is this dream

supposed to mean? The sun, the moon and the eleven stars, are all bowing down to   you!? Do you think that I, your mother and the whole family is going to come bowing to

you?”

Shortly thereafter, Jacob sends Joseph to go check on his brothers in Shechem, of all places. What’s been happening in Shechem lately? The last news out of Shechem was that Dinah, the sister of Joseph and his brothers, was taken there by the prince (also named Shechem) of Shechem. Shechem asked Jacob for permission to marry Dinah, and Jacob’s sons gave permission, with the caveat that all of the men of the city must first circumcise themselves. Then, while the Shechemites were recuperating, Simon and Levi undertook a commando raid, in which they both rescued Dinah and murdered the entire town. Shechem is a city that’s been soaked in blood and deceit by Joseph’s brothers.



**Shechem**

And now Jacob is telling Joseph, “go meet your brothers in Shechem.” Joseph knows that the brothers are angry and jealous of him, and he senses danger. After Jacob asks him to go check on the brothers, Joseph issues a short, but telling response:

**Exodus 37:13**

הִ ֵּֽנ ִני

Here I am

## PONDER THIS



This word - hineni - is a rarely used phrase that carries a particularly strong association. Who was the first person to use this word in the book of Genesis? Is there any similarity between those circumstances and Joseph’s situation at this moment?

The earlier, famous “*hineni*” took place at the binding of Isaac:

**Genesis 22:1-2**

**בראשית כב:א–ב**

**1** And it came to pass after these things, that God

ֶּלה, ְו ָה ֱאלֹקים, ִנ ָּסה ה ֵא

ה ְ ּד ָב ִרים

**א** ו ְי ִהי, ַא ַחר

tested Abraham, and He said to him, “Abraham,” and he said, “**Here I am**.” **2** And He said, “Please take your son, your only one, whom you love, yea, Isaac, and go away to the land of Moriah and bring him up there for a burnt offering on one of the mountains, of which I will tell you.”

ֶאת-א ְב ָר ָהם; ַו ּיֹא ֶמר ֵא ָליו, ַא ְב ָר ָהם ַו ּיֹא ֶמר **הִ ֵּנ ִני. ב**

ו ּיֹא ֶמר ַקח-נא ֶאת- ִב ְנ ָך ֶאת- ְי ִחי ְד ָך ֲא ׁ ֶשר-א ַה ְב ָּת,

את- ִי ְצ ָחק, ְו ֶל ְך- ְל ָך, ֶאל-א ֶרץ ה ּמֹ ִר ָ ּיה; ְו ַה ֲע ֵלהו ׁ ָשם,

לעֹ ָלה, ַעל ַא ַחד ה ָה ִרים, ֲא ׁ ֶשר אֹ ַמר ֵא ֶלי ָך.

It was Abraham’s response to God right before he was called to sacrifice his son Isaac. In that instance, doom was right around the corner. A father, Abraham, was being commanded to kill his own son.

**Here’s what we can’t help but wonder:** Could it be that Joseph feels like he’s in a similar situation? After all,

*his* father is asking him to meet his brothers in their favorite locale for treachery and murder.

Joseph says “*hineni*” and trusts his father’s command, but ends up stepping right into his worst nightmare. His brothers jump him, strip him of his clothes, throw him in the pit, and sell him off to Egypt.

What happened here? Was this a set up? Who’s to blame for all this?

# The Aftermath

As the story continues, the plot only thickens. Let’s take a look at the aftermath of the sale.

## LOOK INSIDE: Goats and Coats



Read the verses below and ask yourself: What does Joseph know, and what doesn’t he know?

**Genesis 37:31-34**

**בראשית לז:לא-לד**

**31** Then they [Joseph’s brothers] took Joseph’s tunic,

ע ִ ּזים, ַו ִ ּי ְט ְּבל ּו

ׂש ִעיר

את- ְכתֹ ֶנת י ֹו ֵסף; ַו ִ ּי ׁ ְש ֲחט ּו

**לא** ו ִ ּי ְקחו,

slaughtered a kid, and dipped the tunic in the blood. **32**

את- ְכתֹ ֶנת ה ַּפ ִּסים, ַו ָ ּי ִביאו

את-ה ֻּכ ּתֹ ֶנת ּב ָ ּדם. **לב** ו ְי ׁ ַש ְּלחו

They had the ornamented tunic taken to their father, and they said, “We found this. Please examine it; is it

ִבי ֶהם, ַו ּיֹא ְמר ּו, זֹאת מ ָצאנ ּו: ה ֶּכר-נא, ה ְּכתֹ ֶנת ּב ְנ ָך **לג** ו ַ ּי ִּכי ָר ּה ַו ּיֹא ֶמר ּכתֹ ֶנת ּב ִני, ח ָ ּיה ָר ָעה אל-אהוא--אם-לֹא.

your son’s tunic or not?” **33** He recognized it, and said,

“My son’s tunic! A savage beast devoured him! Joseph

ֹטרף טֹ ַרף, י ֹו ֵסף. **לד** ו ִ ּי ְק ַרע ַי ֲעקֹב ׂש ְמלֹ ָתיו,

א ָכ ָל ְתהו;

was torn by a beast!” **34** Jacob rent his clothes, put sackcloth on his loins, and observed mourning for his son many days.

ְבנ ֹו, ָי ִמים ַר ִּבים. על-

ּב ָמ ְת ָניו; ַו ִ ּי ְת ַא ֵּבל

ו ָ ּי ֶ ׂשם ׂשק

Was Joseph aware of any of this? About the tunic dipped in blood, about his brothers’ lie, about Jacob’s mourning? No,

he *couldn’t* have known. He was already bumping down the road in the back of an Ishmaelite caravan, bound for Egypt.

And for all of those years in Egypt, when Joseph was working in Potifar’s house and languishing in a jail cell in Egypt, his

father never sent a search party. Joseph never hears from his father - not once!

# Coming Into Focus

So let’s recap: What does Joseph **know**, and what does he **not know**?





|  |
| --- |
| **What Joseph knows…**   * His brothers hate him * Jacob got angry at him over his dream * Jacob told him to go meet his brothers in Shechem * His brothers have a history of being violent in Shechem * Joseph said hineni * His brothers abducted him and sold him as a slave * His father never tries to find him or to make contact |
|  |
| **What Joseph doesn’t know…**   * The brothers dipped Joseph’s coat in blood to trick their father * Jacob thinks that Joseph was killed by a wild animal * Jacob is mourning over Joseph’s death |

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## PONDER THIS



How might all of this change the story from Joseph’s point of view? Specifically, how might it change

what he thinks about his father’s role in these events?

# Get Out of My House, You Dreamer!

From Joseph’s perspective, what might have happened when his brothers returned home after selling him into slavery? For all he knows, maybe they came to back to their father and said, “You know, Dad, it was either him or us! We got rid of him for good!” Maybe it was all a plot to oust Joseph from the family!

Now, it might sound crazy to suggest that Joseph thinks his father kicked him out of the family, but remember this critical fact: it’s happened before. Joseph must know his own family history; Abraham wanted to keep Ishmael around, but Sarah didn’t think it was a good idea. God sided with Sarah, and that was the end of Ishmael. Then, there was Jacob and Esau. Jacob got the family’s blessing, and Esau got expelled from the family. He was left out to dry.

So you’re Joseph, and you’ve been in Egypt for all of this time. The years go by, and nobody from the family ever comes looking for you. Maybe it’s because they don’t want you back. Maybe your father and brothers are happy to have you out of the picture. After all, you just made their lives more difficult.

**Egypt: A New Life, A New Family**

Indeed, we can get a further glimpse into Joseph’s experience by looking at the names he gives to his two sons who are born to him in Egypt:

**Genesis 41:51-52**

**בראשית מא:נא-נב**

**51** Joseph named the first-born Manasseh, meaning,

ּכי-נ ׁ ַּש ִני

מ ַנ ׁ ֶּשה:

ְּבכ ֹור, ה

את- ׁשם

**נא** ו ִ ּי ְק ָרא י ֹו ֵסף

“God has made me forget completely my hardship

א ִבי. **נב** ו ֵאת ׁ ֵשם

ָכל-ע ָמ ִלי, ְו ֵאת ּכל- ֵבית את-

אלֹקים

and my father’s house.” **5**2 And the second he named Ephraim, meaning, “God has made me fertile in the land of my affliction.”

ֶרץ ע ְנ ִיי. ּב ֶא

ְפ ַר ִני אלֹקים, ּכי-ה

ְפ ָר ִים: א

ה ׁ ֵּש ִני, ָק ָרא

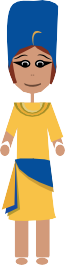
**PONDER THIS**



*Menashe… I’ve forgotten how I suffered in my father’s house. Ephraim… I’ve become fruitful in the land of my oppression.*

Do these names reveal anything about how Joseph now sees his relationship with Jacob?

We would expect Joseph to want to forget all the hard times with his *brothers*, but the verse isn’t only talking about about his brothers; it’s talking about his *father*.



The name “Menashe” suggests that Joseph saw his relationship with his father as being fundamentally broken -- and in this moment, over a decade after that ordeal at the pit, Joseph is finally severing ties with his family and moving on. The name “Ephraim” suggests that he’s building a new life for himself and leaving his painful past behind. For Joseph, the birth of his sons is the beginning of a new chapter. He

praises God for allowing him to build a successful future in Egypt despite the great suffering he’s endured. Joseph has lived a painful life, but it will not stop him from moving forward on his own, without his family. It’s really no wonder that he never sends a postcard home.

# Setting The Stage

If you adopt this perspective, it doesn’t only change the way you look at Joseph’s relationship with Jacob; it changes how you understand his relationship with Pharaoh, too. Because if anyone is there to help Joseph crawl his way back from adversity, it’s Pharaoh.

Joseph’s family threw him into a pit. In Egypt, Pharaoh pulls him out of a pit: the dungeon where he was imprisoned.2

Joseph’s family hated his dreams. Pharaoh says to him, “I hear you know how to interpret dreams. Could you interpret my dreams?” Pharaoh listens to Joseph and likes what he has to say.3

Jacob once gave Joseph beautiful clothes that caused him tremendous pain and suffering. Pharaoh also gives Joseph beautiful new clothes4, and then props him up as second in-command of all of Egypt.

In a sense, Pharaoh gives Joseph everything he ever would have wanted - but didn’t get - from his own father. Pharaoh even gives Joseph a new name and a wife. He elevates him and sets him on a path for success. What kind of man gives you a name, a wife, a future? These are the kinds of things that a *father* provides for his son.

Having been abandoned by his own father, Joseph finds a surrogate father-figure in Pharaoh. And while Joseph finally “makes it” with Pharaoh’s help, he then faces a new challenge: where does his loyalty lie? Who is Joseph’s real family, and real father?

It’s all very fine for Joseph to have this close paternal relationship with Pharaoh while Jacob is back in Canaan, but what will happen if Jacob is ever reunited with Joseph? What will happen if they meet up once again? This tension sets the stage for the real climax of Joseph’s story… but you’ll have to wait until the Guide to Parshat Vayechi (which will be released in two weeks!) to see how it all plays out.

2 Contrast Genesis 37:24 and Genesis 41:14. Notice the usage of the word ֹור בּ, which can mean “ pit,” but also “dungeon/prison.” These sources and those in the footnotes below are available on your Source Sheet for further exploration.

3 Contrast Genesis 37:10 and Genesis 41:15.

4 Contrast Genesis 37:3 and Genesis 41:14.



Miketz: Why Didn’t Joseph Write Home?

Source Sheet Page 1

**Genesis 37:31-34**

**בראשית לז:לא-לד**

**31** Then they took Joseph’s tunic, slaughtered a kid, and

ע ִ ּזים, ַו ִ ּי ְט ְּבל ּו את-

ׂש ִעיר

**לא** ו ִ ּי ְקחו, את- ְכתֹ ֶנת י ֹו ֵסף; ַו ִ ּי ׁ ְש ֲחט ּו

dipped the tunic in the blood. **32** They had the ornamented

ה ַּפ ִּסים, ַו ָ ּי ִביאו אל-א ִבי ֶהם,

ה ֻּכ ּתֹנת ּב ָ ּדם. **לב** ו ְי ׁ ַש ְּלחו את- ְכתֹ ֶנת

tunic taken to their father, and they said, “We found this.

הוא--אם-לֹא. **לג**

ו ּיֹא ְמר ּו, זֹאת מ ָצאנ ּו: ה ֶּכר-נא, ה ְּכתֹ ֶנת ּב ְנ ָך

Please examine it; is it your son’s tunic or not?” **33** He

recognized it, and said, “My son’s tunic! A savage beast

ח ָ ּיה ָר ָעה א ָכ ָל ְתהו; טרֹף טֹ ַרף, י ֹו ֵסף. **לד**

ו ַ ּי ִּכי ָר ּה ַו ּיֹא ֶמר ּכתֹ ֶנת ּב ִני,

devoured him! Joseph was torn by a beast!” **34** Jacob rent his clothes, put sackcloth on his loins, and observed mourning for his son many days.

ּב ָמ ְת ָניו; ַו ִ ּי ְת ַא ֵּבל על- ְבנ ֹו, ָי ִמים

ׂשק

ׂש ְמלֹ ָתיו, ַו ָ ּי ֶ ׂשם

ַו ִ ּי ְק ַרע ַי ֲעקֹב

רַ ִּבים.

**Genesis 37:12-13**

### בראשית לז:יב-יג

**12** One time, when his brothers had gone to pasture their

ו ּיֹא ֶמר ִי ְ ׂש ָר ֵאל

את-צֹאן א ִבי ֶהם, ּב ׁ ְש ֶכם. **יג**

ְרע ֹות ל

א ָחיו,

**יב** ו ֵ ּי ְלכ ּו,

father’s flock at Shechem, **13** Israel said to Joseph, “Your brothers are pasturing at Shechem. Come, I will send you to them.” He answered, “Here I am.”

ֵלי ֶהם; ַו ּיֹא ֶמר א

ּב ׁ ְש ֶכם-- ְל ָכה, ְו ֶא ׁ ְש ָל ֲח ָך

ֶחי ָך רֹ ִעים א

ֹוא הל

ֶאל-י ֹו ֵסף,

ל ֹו, הִ ֵּנ ִני.

**Genesis 41:51-52**

### בראשית מא:נא-נב

**51** Joseph named the first-born Manasseh, meaning, “God

ָכל- את-

אלֹקים

מ ַנ ׁ ֶּשה: ּכי-נ ׁ ַּש ִני

ׁשם ה ְּבכ ֹור, את-

**נא** ו ִ ּי ְק ָרא י ֹו ֵסף

has made me forget completely my hardship and my father’s house.” **52** And the second he named Ephraim, meaning, “God has made me fertile in the land of my affliction.”

Think of friends and family who will love it as much as you did - and share it with them!

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Thanks for understanding - we love you guys, too.

Love the guide?

Then SHARE and SUPPORT!

ְפ ַר ִני ּכי-ה

ְפ ָר ִים: א

ה ׁ ֵּש ִני, ָק ָרא

א ִבי. **נב** ו ֵאת ׁ ֵשם

ע ָמ ִלי, ְו ֵאת ּכל- ֵבית

אֱלֹקים, ּבאֶ ֶרץ ע ְנ ִיי.



Miketz: Why Didn’t Joseph Write Home?

Source Sheet Page 2

**Genesis 37:3**

**3** And Israel loved Joseph more than all his sons, because he was a son of his old age; and he made him a fine woolen coat.

מ ָּכל- ָב ָניו-- ִכי-בן-ז ֻק ִנים

ַפ ִּסים.

### בראשית לז:ג

**ג** ְו ִי ְ ׂש ָר ֵאל, א ַהב את-י ֹו ֵסף

הוא, ל ֹו; ְו ָע ָ ׂשה ל ֹו, ּכתֹ ֶנת

**Genesis 37:10**

### בראשית לז:י

**10** And he told [it] to his father and to his brothers, and his

אל-א ִביו, ְו ֶאל-א ָחיו, ַו ִ ּי ְג ַער-ב ֹו א ִביו, ַו ּיֹא ֶמר

**י** ו ְי ַס ֵּפר

father rebuked him and said to him, “What is this dream

ְמ ָּת: הב ֹוא ָנב ֹוא, א ִני ח ָל

ה ֶ ּזה א ׁ ֶשר

ל ֹו מה ה ֲחל ֹום

that you have dreamed? Will we come I, your mother, and your brothers to prostrate ourselves to you to the ground?”

ְר ָצה. א

ָך, ל

ל ִה ׁ ְש ַּת ֲחוֹת

ו ִא ְּמ ָך ְו ַא ֶחי ָך,

**Genesis 37:24**

### בראשית לז:כד

**24** And they took him and cast him into the pit; now the pit

was empty there was no water in it.

מ ִים.

ֹו ב

אין

ה ּ ֹב ָרה; ְו ַה ּב ֹור ֵרק,

**כד** ו ִ ּי ָּק ֻחהו--ו ַ ּי ׁ ְש ִלכ ּו אֹת ֹו,

**Genesis 41:14-15**

**14** So Pharaoh sent and called Joseph, and they rushed him from the dungeon, and he shaved and changed his

ֹו ֵסף, ַו ְי ִרי ֻצהו מן-ה ּב ֹור; ּפ ְר ֹעה. טו ו ּיֹא ֶמר את-י בא אל-

### בראשית מא:יד–טו

**יד** ַו ִ ּי ׁ ְש ַלח ַפ ְרעֹה ַו ִ ּי ְק ָרא

ו ְי ַג ַּלח ַו ְי ַח ֵּלף ׂש ְמלֹ ָתיו, ַו ָ ּי

clothes, and he [then] came to Pharaoh. **15** And Pharaoh

ֵתר אין אֹת ֹו; פ

ַפ ְרעֹה, אל-י ֹו ֵסף, חל ֹום ח ַל ְמ ִּתי, ו

said to Joseph, “I have dreamed a dream, and there is no interpreter for it, but I have heard it said of you [that] you understand a dream, to interpret it.”

ֹום, ל ְפ ּתֹר חל

לאמֹר, ִת ׁ ְש ַמע

ֶלי ָך ע

ַו ֲא ִני, ׁ ָש ַמ ְע ִּתי

אֹת ֹו.



**MIKETZ: WHY DIDN’T JOSEPH WRITE HOME?**

Welcome to the Aleph Beta Study Guide to Parshat Miketz!

Parshat Miketz gives rise to one of the greatest questions that you can ask about the whole Book of Genesis: *Why didn’t Joseph write home to his father?*

Let’s take a step back and explain *why* this is such a big question. We know that at age seventeen, Joseph was sold into slavery, and he ends up spending over a decade in prison in Egypt. It doesn’t appear that he tries to reach out to his father at all during that time. But then again, we wouldn’t expect him to. It’s not as if he could just drop a letter in the mail at the Goshen Post Office. As a prisoner in ancient Egypt, Joseph has no telephone and no freedom of movement.

But by the time we are re-acquainted with Joseph at the beginning of our parsha, it’s a different story entirely. Now he’s second in command to Pharaoh, lording over the whole land of Egypt. His fortunes have turned fantastically, and, from his position of power, he can do pretty much whatever he likes. Wouldn’t we expect that he would try to reach out to his father? He could send envoys to the land of Canaan, he could make a visit himself. If he really loves Jacob, why doesn’t he at least write him a postcard?



But strangely, Joseph never reaches out. Why is that?

To make sense of this, we’re going to have to take a careful look at the Joseph story from Joseph’s *own* perspective. One of the challenges that we face as readers of the Bible is to understand that we may know more about the story than any of the individuals actually involved in that story. So for us to really inhabit Joseph’s mind, we’re going to have to ask ourselves: what do *we* know that *Joseph* doesn’t know, and how does realizing this change the way that we understand the story?1

If we can get inside of Joseph’s mind and begin to see things from his perspective, it will shed a great deal of light on our question about why he never wrote home.

1 This line of questioning was inspired by an article in the first issue of Megadim, an Israel-based Tanakh journal, which contains an extended debate on this topic between Rav Yaakov Medan and Rav Yoel Bin-Nun.

**INSTRUCTIONS**

There are a lot of divrei Torah on the parsha. How is this different?

At Aleph Beta, we believe that the Torah is a guidebook that answers life’s biggest questions, offering profound insights about how we should live our lives. Moreover, we believe that Jewish tradition has always recognized the right of all readers, in every generation, to look at the text themselves and try to decide what they think it means. That means you. That’s why you are the most important author of this quest through the sources. We think that this guide offers a fun, stimulating and relevant path through the sources, but if you get wrapped up in a stimulating discussion and never make it past page 2, we’ll consider that a success!

Is this guide for self-study or should I study it with others?

Either works! You can gather a small group of friends to explore it together, share it with a chevruta (learning partner), or go through it by yourself.

Do I need to prepare anything or can I just jump in?

Just jump in! Even if you’re planning to use this for a group discussion, just open up to page 1 and get going. (If you read it in advance, it will spoil the fun!) The only thing you should do in advance is print out copies of the “Source Sheet” for the other participants, so everyone can follow along and engage with the sources.

About the Author

Most of the material within – although not the particular language contained in this guide - was first developed and taught by Rabbi David Fohrman, founder and CEO of Aleph Beta, and is presented in his video, “Parshat Miketz: Why Didn’t Joseph Write Home?” (available for viewing at www.alephbeta.org). This guide was written by Ami Silver, edited by Rivky Stern and Beth Lesch, and arranged by Laura Schembre.

# What Does Joseph Know?

To get started, we’ll need to go back earlier, to the start of the Joseph saga. That is where our story really begins. Our guiding question is going to be: what does Joseph actually know about what transpired?

He knows that when he was seventeen years old, he had this dream that seemed to portend that he would rise to a position of power. He told the dream to his brothers,

and they became jealous of him. Then, he had a second dream, which he told to his  brothers, and now, also, to his father. Now, Jacob had always loved Joseph; he even

made him a special coat as a sign of his affection. But when Jacob hears Joseph’s  dream, he gets angry at Joseph. He castigates him, and says, “What is this dream

supposed to mean? The sun, the moon and the eleven stars, are all bowing down to   you!? Do you think that I, your mother and the whole family is going to come bowing to

you?”

Shortly thereafter, Jacob sends Joseph to go check on his brothers in Shechem, of all places. What’s been happening in Shechem lately? The last news out of Shechem was that Dinah, the sister of Joseph and his brothers, was taken there by the prince (also named Shechem) of Shechem. Shechem asked Jacob for permission to marry Dinah, and Jacob’s sons gave permission, with the caveat that all of the men of the city must first circumcise themselves. Then, while the Shechemites were recuperating, Simon and Levi undertook a commando raid, in which they both rescued Dinah and murdered the entire town. Shechem is a city that’s been soaked in blood and deceit by Joseph’s brothers.



**Shechem**

And now Jacob is telling Joseph, “go meet your brothers in Shechem.” Joseph knows that the brothers are angry and jealous of him, and he senses danger. After Jacob asks him to go check on the brothers, Joseph issues a short, but telling response:

**Exodus 37:13**

הִ ֵּֽנ ִני

Here I am

## PONDER THIS



This word - hineni - is a rarely used phrase that carries a particularly strong association. Who was the first person to use this word in the book of Genesis? Is there any similarity between those circumstances and Joseph’s situation at this moment?

The earlier, famous “*hineni*” took place at the binding of Isaac:

**Genesis 22:1-2**

**בראשית כב:א–ב**

**1** And it came to pass after these things, that God

ֶּלה, ְו ָה ֱאלֹקים, ִנ ָּסה ה ֵא

ה ְ ּד ָב ִרים

**א** ו ְי ִהי, ַא ַחר

tested Abraham, and He said to him, “Abraham,” and he said, “**Here I am**.” **2** And He said, “Please take your son, your only one, whom you love, yea, Isaac, and go away to the land of Moriah and bring him up there for a burnt offering on one of the mountains, of which I will tell you.”

ֶאת-א ְב ָר ָהם; ַו ּיֹא ֶמר ֵא ָליו, ַא ְב ָר ָהם ַו ּיֹא ֶמר **הִ ֵּנ ִני. ב**

ו ּיֹא ֶמר ַקח-נא ֶאת- ִב ְנ ָך ֶאת- ְי ִחי ְד ָך ֲא ׁ ֶשר-א ַה ְב ָּת,

את- ִי ְצ ָחק, ְו ֶל ְך- ְל ָך, ֶאל-א ֶרץ ה ּמֹ ִר ָ ּיה; ְו ַה ֲע ֵלהו ׁ ָשם,

לעֹ ָלה, ַעל ַא ַחד ה ָה ִרים, ֲא ׁ ֶשר אֹ ַמר ֵא ֶלי ָך.

It was Abraham’s response to God right before he was called to sacrifice his son Isaac. In that instance, doom was right around the corner. A father, Abraham, was being commanded to kill his own son.

**Here’s what we can’t help but wonder:** Could it be that Joseph feels like he’s in a similar situation? After all,

*his* father is asking him to meet his brothers in their favorite locale for treachery and murder.

Joseph says “*hineni*” and trusts his father’s command, but ends up stepping right into his worst nightmare. His brothers jump him, strip him of his clothes, throw him in the pit, and sell him off to Egypt.

What happened here? Was this a set up? Who’s to blame for all this?

# The Aftermath

As the story continues, the plot only thickens. Let’s take a look at the aftermath of the sale.

## LOOK INSIDE: Goats and Coats



Read the verses below and ask yourself: What does Joseph know, and what doesn’t he know?

**Genesis 37:31-34**

**בראשית לז:לא-לד**

**31** Then they [Joseph’s brothers] took Joseph’s tunic,

ע ִ ּזים, ַו ִ ּי ְט ְּבל ּו

ׂש ִעיר

את- ְכתֹ ֶנת י ֹו ֵסף; ַו ִ ּי ׁ ְש ֲחט ּו

**לא** ו ִ ּי ְקחו,

slaughtered a kid, and dipped the tunic in the blood. **32**

את- ְכתֹ ֶנת ה ַּפ ִּסים, ַו ָ ּי ִביאו

את-ה ֻּכ ּתֹ ֶנת ּב ָ ּדם. **לב** ו ְי ׁ ַש ְּלחו

They had the ornamented tunic taken to their father, and they said, “We found this. Please examine it; is it

ִבי ֶהם, ַו ּיֹא ְמר ּו, זֹאת מ ָצאנ ּו: ה ֶּכר-נא, ה ְּכתֹ ֶנת ּב ְנ ָך **לג** ו ַ ּי ִּכי ָר ּה ַו ּיֹא ֶמר ּכתֹ ֶנת ּב ִני, ח ָ ּיה ָר ָעה אל-אהוא--אם-לֹא.

your son’s tunic or not?” **33** He recognized it, and said,

“My son’s tunic! A savage beast devoured him! Joseph

ֹטרף טֹ ַרף, י ֹו ֵסף. **לד** ו ִ ּי ְק ַרע ַי ֲעקֹב ׂש ְמלֹ ָתיו,

א ָכ ָל ְתהו;

was torn by a beast!” **34** Jacob rent his clothes, put sackcloth on his loins, and observed mourning for his son many days.

ְבנ ֹו, ָי ִמים ַר ִּבים. על-

ּב ָמ ְת ָניו; ַו ִ ּי ְת ַא ֵּבל

ו ָ ּי ֶ ׂשם ׂשק

Was Joseph aware of any of this? About the tunic dipped in blood, about his brothers’ lie, about Jacob’s mourning? No,

he *couldn’t* have known. He was already bumping down the road in the back of an Ishmaelite caravan, bound for Egypt.

And for all of those years in Egypt, when Joseph was working in Potifar’s house and languishing in a jail cell in Egypt, his

father never sent a search party. Joseph never hears from his father - not once!

# Coming Into Focus

So let’s recap: What does Joseph **know**, and what does he **not know**?





|  |
| --- |
| **What Joseph knows…**   * His brothers hate him * Jacob got angry at him over his dream * Jacob told him to go meet his brothers in Shechem * His brothers have a history of being violent in Shechem * Joseph said hineni * His brothers abducted him and sold him as a slave * His father never tries to find him or to make contact |
|  |
| **What Joseph doesn’t know…**   * The brothers dipped Joseph’s coat in blood to trick their father * Jacob thinks that Joseph was killed by a wild animal * Jacob is mourning over Joseph’s death |

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## PONDER THIS



How might all of this change the story from Joseph’s point of view? Specifically, how might it change

what he thinks about his father’s role in these events?

# Get Out of My House, You Dreamer!

From Joseph’s perspective, what might have happened when his brothers returned home after selling him into slavery? For all he knows, maybe they came to back to their father and said, “You know, Dad, it was either him or us! We got rid of him for good!” Maybe it was all a plot to oust Joseph from the family!

Now, it might sound crazy to suggest that Joseph thinks his father kicked him out of the family, but remember this critical fact: it’s happened before. Joseph must know his own family history; Abraham wanted to keep Ishmael around, but Sarah didn’t think it was a good idea. God sided with Sarah, and that was the end of Ishmael. Then, there was Jacob and Esau. Jacob got the family’s blessing, and Esau got expelled from the family. He was left out to dry.

So you’re Joseph, and you’ve been in Egypt for all of this time. The years go by, and nobody from the family ever comes looking for you. Maybe it’s because they don’t want you back. Maybe your father and brothers are happy to have you out of the picture. After all, you just made their lives more difficult.

**Egypt: A New Life, A New Family**

Indeed, we can get a further glimpse into Joseph’s experience by looking at the names he gives to his two sons who are born to him in Egypt:

**Genesis 41:51-52**

**בראשית מא:נא-נב**

**51** Joseph named the first-born Manasseh, meaning,

ּכי-נ ׁ ַּש ִני

מ ַנ ׁ ֶּשה:

ְּבכ ֹור, ה

את- ׁשם

**נא** ו ִ ּי ְק ָרא י ֹו ֵסף

“God has made me forget completely my hardship

א ִבי. **נב** ו ֵאת ׁ ֵשם

ָכל-ע ָמ ִלי, ְו ֵאת ּכל- ֵבית את-

אלֹקים

and my father’s house.” **5**2 And the second he named Ephraim, meaning, “God has made me fertile in the land of my affliction.”

ֶרץ ע ְנ ִיי. ּב ֶא

ְפ ַר ִני אלֹקים, ּכי-ה

ְפ ָר ִים: א

ה ׁ ֵּש ִני, ָק ָרא

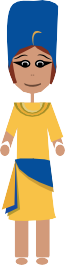
**PONDER THIS**



*Menashe… I’ve forgotten how I suffered in my father’s house. Ephraim… I’ve become fruitful in the land of my oppression.*

Do these names reveal anything about how Joseph now sees his relationship with Jacob?

We would expect Joseph to want to forget all the hard times with his *brothers*, but the verse isn’t only talking about about his brothers; it’s talking about his *father*.



The name “Menashe” suggests that Joseph saw his relationship with his father as being fundamentally broken -- and in this moment, over a decade after that ordeal at the pit, Joseph is finally severing ties with his family and moving on. The name “Ephraim” suggests that he’s building a new life for himself and leaving his painful past behind. For Joseph, the birth of his sons is the beginning of a new chapter. He

praises God for allowing him to build a successful future in Egypt despite the great suffering he’s endured. Joseph has lived a painful life, but it will not stop him from moving forward on his own, without his family. It’s really no wonder that he never sends a postcard home.

# Setting The Stage

If you adopt this perspective, it doesn’t only change the way you look at Joseph’s relationship with Jacob; it changes how you understand his relationship with Pharaoh, too. Because if anyone is there to help Joseph crawl his way back from adversity, it’s Pharaoh.

Joseph’s family threw him into a pit. In Egypt, Pharaoh pulls him out of a pit: the dungeon where he was imprisoned.2

Joseph’s family hated his dreams. Pharaoh says to him, “I hear you know how to interpret dreams. Could you interpret my dreams?” Pharaoh listens to Joseph and likes what he has to say.3

Jacob once gave Joseph beautiful clothes that caused him tremendous pain and suffering. Pharaoh also gives Joseph beautiful new clothes4, and then props him up as second in-command of all of Egypt.

In a sense, Pharaoh gives Joseph everything he ever would have wanted - but didn’t get - from his own father. Pharaoh even gives Joseph a new name and a wife. He elevates him and sets him on a path for success. What kind of man gives you a name, a wife, a future? These are the kinds of things that a *father* provides for his son.

Having been abandoned by his own father, Joseph finds a surrogate father-figure in Pharaoh. And while Joseph finally “makes it” with Pharaoh’s help, he then faces a new challenge: where does his loyalty lie? Who is Joseph’s real family, and real father?

It’s all very fine for Joseph to have this close paternal relationship with Pharaoh while Jacob is back in Canaan, but what will happen if Jacob is ever reunited with Joseph? What will happen if they meet up once again? This tension sets the stage for the real climax of Joseph’s story… but you’ll have to wait until the Guide to Parshat Vayechi (which will be released in two weeks!) to see how it all plays out.

2 Contrast Genesis 37:24 and Genesis 41:14. Notice the usage of the word ֹור בּ, which can mean “ pit,” but also “dungeon/prison.” These sources and those in the footnotes below are available on your Source Sheet for further exploration.

3 Contrast Genesis 37:10 and Genesis 41:15.

4 Contrast Genesis 37:3 and Genesis 41:14.



Miketz: Why Didn’t Joseph Write Home?

Source Sheet Page 1

**Genesis 37:31-34**

**בראשית לז:לא-לד**

**31** Then they took Joseph’s tunic, slaughtered a kid, and

ע ִ ּזים, ַו ִ ּי ְט ְּבל ּו את-

ׂש ִעיר

**לא** ו ִ ּי ְקחו, את- ְכתֹ ֶנת י ֹו ֵסף; ַו ִ ּי ׁ ְש ֲחט ּו

dipped the tunic in the blood. **32** They had the ornamented

ה ַּפ ִּסים, ַו ָ ּי ִביאו אל-א ִבי ֶהם,

ה ֻּכ ּתֹנת ּב ָ ּדם. **לב** ו ְי ׁ ַש ְּלחו את- ְכתֹ ֶנת

tunic taken to their father, and they said, “We found this.

הוא--אם-לֹא. **לג**

ו ּיֹא ְמר ּו, זֹאת מ ָצאנ ּו: ה ֶּכר-נא, ה ְּכתֹ ֶנת ּב ְנ ָך

Please examine it; is it your son’s tunic or not?” **33** He

recognized it, and said, “My son’s tunic! A savage beast

ח ָ ּיה ָר ָעה א ָכ ָל ְתהו; טרֹף טֹ ַרף, י ֹו ֵסף. **לד**

ו ַ ּי ִּכי ָר ּה ַו ּיֹא ֶמר ּכתֹ ֶנת ּב ִני,

devoured him! Joseph was torn by a beast!” **34** Jacob rent his clothes, put sackcloth on his loins, and observed mourning for his son many days.

ּב ָמ ְת ָניו; ַו ִ ּי ְת ַא ֵּבל על- ְבנ ֹו, ָי ִמים

ׂשק

ׂש ְמלֹ ָתיו, ַו ָ ּי ֶ ׂשם

ַו ִ ּי ְק ַרע ַי ֲעקֹב

רַ ִּבים.

**Genesis 37:12-13**

### בראשית לז:יב-יג

**12** One time, when his brothers had gone to pasture their

ו ּיֹא ֶמר ִי ְ ׂש ָר ֵאל

את-צֹאן א ִבי ֶהם, ּב ׁ ְש ֶכם. **יג**

ְרע ֹות ל

א ָחיו,

**יב** ו ֵ ּי ְלכ ּו,

father’s flock at Shechem, **13** Israel said to Joseph, “Your brothers are pasturing at Shechem. Come, I will send you to them.” He answered, “Here I am.”

ֵלי ֶהם; ַו ּיֹא ֶמר א

ּב ׁ ְש ֶכם-- ְל ָכה, ְו ֶא ׁ ְש ָל ֲח ָך

ֶחי ָך רֹ ִעים א

ֹוא הל

ֶאל-י ֹו ֵסף,

ל ֹו, הִ ֵּנ ִני.

**Genesis 41:51-52**

### בראשית מא:נא-נב

**51** Joseph named the first-born Manasseh, meaning, “God

ָכל- את-

אלֹקים

מ ַנ ׁ ֶּשה: ּכי-נ ׁ ַּש ִני

ׁשם ה ְּבכ ֹור, את-

**נא** ו ִ ּי ְק ָרא י ֹו ֵסף

has made me forget completely my hardship and my father’s house.” **52** And the second he named Ephraim, meaning, “God has made me fertile in the land of my affliction.”

Think of friends and family who will love it as much as you did - and share it with them!

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ְפ ַר ִני ּכי-ה

ְפ ָר ִים: א

ה ׁ ֵּש ִני, ָק ָרא

א ִבי. **נב** ו ֵאת ׁ ֵשם

ע ָמ ִלי, ְו ֵאת ּכל- ֵבית

אֱלֹקים, ּבאֶ ֶרץ ע ְנ ִיי.



Miketz: Why Didn’t Joseph Write Home?

Source Sheet Page 2

**Genesis 37:3**

**3** And Israel loved Joseph more than all his sons, because he was a son of his old age; and he made him a fine woolen coat.

מ ָּכל- ָב ָניו-- ִכי-בן-ז ֻק ִנים

ַפ ִּסים.

### בראשית לז:ג

**ג** ְו ִי ְ ׂש ָר ֵאל, א ַהב את-י ֹו ֵסף

הוא, ל ֹו; ְו ָע ָ ׂשה ל ֹו, ּכתֹ ֶנת

**Genesis 37:10**

### בראשית לז:י

**10** And he told [it] to his father and to his brothers, and his

אל-א ִביו, ְו ֶאל-א ָחיו, ַו ִ ּי ְג ַער-ב ֹו א ִביו, ַו ּיֹא ֶמר

**י** ו ְי ַס ֵּפר

father rebuked him and said to him, “What is this dream

ְמ ָּת: הב ֹוא ָנב ֹוא, א ִני ח ָל

ה ֶ ּזה א ׁ ֶשר

ל ֹו מה ה ֲחל ֹום

that you have dreamed? Will we come I, your mother, and your brothers to prostrate ourselves to you to the ground?”

ְר ָצה. א

ָך, ל

ל ִה ׁ ְש ַּת ֲחוֹת

ו ִא ְּמ ָך ְו ַא ֶחי ָך,

**Genesis 37:24**

### בראשית לז:כד

**24** And they took him and cast him into the pit; now the pit

was empty there was no water in it.

מ ִים.

ֹו ב

אין

ה ּ ֹב ָרה; ְו ַה ּב ֹור ֵרק,

**כד** ו ִ ּי ָּק ֻחהו--ו ַ ּי ׁ ְש ִלכ ּו אֹת ֹו,

**Genesis 41:14-15**

**14** So Pharaoh sent and called Joseph, and they rushed him from the dungeon, and he shaved and changed his

ֹו ֵסף, ַו ְי ִרי ֻצהו מן-ה ּב ֹור; ּפ ְר ֹעה. טו ו ּיֹא ֶמר את-י בא אל-

### בראשית מא:יד–טו

**יד** ַו ִ ּי ׁ ְש ַלח ַפ ְרעֹה ַו ִ ּי ְק ָרא

ו ְי ַג ַּלח ַו ְי ַח ֵּלף ׂש ְמלֹ ָתיו, ַו ָ ּי

clothes, and he [then] came to Pharaoh. **15** And Pharaoh

ֵתר אין אֹת ֹו; פ

ַפ ְרעֹה, אל-י ֹו ֵסף, חל ֹום ח ַל ְמ ִּתי, ו

said to Joseph, “I have dreamed a dream, and there is no interpreter for it, but I have heard it said of you [that] you understand a dream, to interpret it.”

ֹום, ל ְפ ּתֹר חל

לאמֹר, ִת ׁ ְש ַמע

ֶלי ָך ע

ַו ֲא ִני, ׁ ָש ַמ ְע ִּתי

אֹת ֹו.

This is Rabbi David Fohrman and welcome to Parshat Miketz. This Parsha gives rise to one of the greatest questions people ask about Sefer B'Reshit: Why didn't Yosef write home? I mean here he is, he is the grand vizier, he's in charge of all the wheat of Egypt, his fortunes have turned fantastically. If he really loves his father, why doesn't he write him a postcard? 'Dad, everything is fine, I am here in Egypt, wishing you were here, love – Joseph.' Some contact. What is going on here?

Commenting on the Questions in Parshat Miketz

I want to sketch out to you a particularly fascinating answer to this question, that I became aware of while reading an article in the very first issue of Megadim, the Israeli-based Tanakh journal. This issue contained an extended debate between Rav Yaakov Meidan and Rav Yoel Bin-Nun and I am going to sketch out to you a piece of Rabbi Bin-Nun's view on this, along with some of my own additional thoughts. Rabbi Bin-Nun argues that to understand the answer this question you have to take a careful look at the Yosef story from the perspective of Yosef himself. One of the great challenges that face us whenever we read any story in the Bible is to understand that you the reader may know more than any individual person actually involved in the story. When you look at the Yosef story, the question you have to ask yourself is 'what do you know that Yosef doesn't know', and how does that change the story once you realize Yosef doesn't know it?

If you have read the story of the sale of Yosef, you become aware that there's a crucial fact that is hidden to Yosef. It's impossible for him to know it because it takes place after he has been loaded on to the Ishmaelite caravan and is starting his journey to Egypt. And that fact, is what the brothers did after Yosef was pulled out of the pit and loaded on to the caravan. What they did was they took a goat, they slaughtered it, put the blood on Yosef's coat and sent it to their father saying, "zot matzanu haker-na," this we have found, recognize, please, is it your son's coat or not?

Yosef doesn't know that that happened. He couldn't have known that it happened. He wasn't around for that. The question you have to ask yourself is, not knowing that that happened, not knowing about the bloody coat, how might that change Yosef's view of the story?

The Relationship Between

Jacob

and His

Son

Joseph

So let's go through the events of the sale of Yosef and ask what the story would look like from his perspective. All Yosef knows is this: he was seventeen years old and he had these dreams - these dreams that seemed to portend that he would rise to a position of power. He told these dreams to his brothers and they became jealous, and then he told the second dream not only to his brothers but to his father as well.

Now his father had loved him, but for the very first time, Yaakov castigates Yosef. He doesn't like this dream. What does this dream mean with the sun, the moon and the eleven stars, all bowing down to you? We are all going to come bowing to you?

And his father scolded him, he was angry at him, and then Yaakov sends him to Shechem to go check on his brothers. Shechem, of all places. What's been happening in Shechem lately? Shimon and Levi and the rest of the brothers undertook a commando raid to rescue Dinah that resulted in the wholesale death of an entire town. Shechem is a place soaked in blood, blood spilled by the brothers of Yosef. Now the brothers are angry, jealous of Yosef. They see him as a threat.

'Why don't you go check on your brother in Shechem?' Yaakov tells Yosef. Yosef sees it's dangerous. His answer, "hineini," here I am. "Hineini" is one of those words in the [book of Genesis](https://www.alephbeta.org/torah/genesis). What does 'hineini' remind you of? Who else said 'hineini' the famous 'hineini' in the book of Genesis? The 'hineini' of Avraham to God and in the story of the binding of Isaac. With that 'hineini,' doom was right around the corner for Yitzhak. With Yosef's 'hineini,' does Yosef realize the doom is right around the corner?

'I agreed, I went to Shechem, I said 'hineini' to you, I trusted that everything would be fine. ut everything wasn't fine. My brothers jumped me, stripped me of my clothes, threw me in the pit, sold me off to Egypt. That's what Yosef knows and now, what doesn't he know?

What

Story

Did

Jacob

Know

About

Joseph

– and Vice Versa?

Tragically he doesn't know that the brothers brought the bloody coat to father, tricking father into thinking Yosef was dead. So from Yosef's perspective, what does he think happened next? For all he knows, maybe they came to back to father and said 'father, it was himb or us!' Maybe father himself saw Yosef as a threat. It's not like nobody have ever been kicked out of the family before.

Avraham, Yitzhak and Ishmael. Avraham wanted to keep Ishmael around. Sarah didn't think it was a good idea. God sided with Sarah. That was the end of Ishmael.

Yaakov and Esav. Esav got expelled from the family.

I'm down, I'm languishing in Egypt, year after year, there's never any search party. Maybe I was kicked out of the family.

Indeed Rav Yoel Bin-Nun points out - look at the names that Yosef gives to his two children: Menashe and Efraim. Menashe, the verse says, "ki nashani Elokim mi-kol amali u-mi-kol beyt avi," God has allowed me to forget, all of my toil, all of my travail at my father's house. Efraim: "ki hifrani Elokim b'eretz an'i," God has allowed me to become fruitful to have all these children and the land of my oppression. Yosef building a new life, leaving his old life behind. He will still be a God-fearing Jew, but what of the ties with his family? Does Yosef think he's been thrown out? That it's all over?

Joseph –

Son

of Jacob, or

Pharaoh?

If you adopt this perspective, it changes the way you look at the Yosef story. It changes the way you look at Yosef and perhaps his relationship with Par'oh, with Pharaoh. Pharaoh pulls him out of the pit, this dungeon that he was in, says 'I hear you know how to interpret dreams? Could you interpret my dream?' Gives him new clothes, beautiful new clothes. Sets him up again as second in-charge, everything that

Yosef would have wanted perhaps from his own father—'where were you when I was in the pit? Here's the man who takes me out of the pit. Where were you when I was stripped off from my clothes? Here's

the man who gives me new clothes.' 'I didn't like your dream.' Here's a man who wants to tell Yosef

dreams and hear his interpretation. Pharaoh gives Yosef a wife, gives him a new name. What kind of man gives you a new name, gives you a wife? A father kind of man. The challenge that faces Yosef – where does your loyalty lie now? Who is your real father?

And it's all very fine for Yosef to remain close to pharaoh now, while Yaakov is back still in Canaan, but what if Yaakov should ever be reunited with Yosef with pharaoh still in the background? That I believe sets up the real climax of the Yosef's story that takes place in Parshat Vayechi. But we’ll have to wait till Parshat Vayechi to talk about it. I’ll see you then.

Watch the next video in this series: Who Was Joseph's Real Father?

Guide by Dr. Sarah Levy



**PARSHAT MIKETZ:FROM PIT TO PALACE: THE MEANING OF JOSEPH’S GROUNDHOG DAY**

This guide corresponds to the video: [From Pit To Palace: The Meaning Of Joseph’s Groundhog Day](https://www.alephbeta.org/playlist/joseph-from-pit-to-palace)

**SABBATH TAB LE OUTLINE**

### A Brief Review

1. So last week we talked about a strange pattern that seems to exist in the Joseph saga. As the saga unfolds, we keep on hearing these echoes…
   1. Various aspects of the original ‘sale of Joseph story’ seem to be coming back to haunt each of the succeeding episodes.
   2. Judah and his interaction with Tamar
   3. Joseph and Potiphar’s wife
   4. Joseph and Pharaoh
   5. Each of these interactions seem to bear the unmistakable hallmarks of Joseph’s Sale. The question was why?
2. So I began to suggest a possible explanation.
   1. Kind of like that weatherman in the *Groundhog Day* film, the protagonists of the Joseph story seem condemned to live through various replays, of sorts, of the Sale of Joseph story – until somehow, things can turn out right; until somehow, each protagonist can sort of fix his part in the ‘perfect storm’ that was Joseph’s Sale.
   2. This week, I want to show you how that actually might be so.
3. Let’s start with the Yehudah and Tamar story.
   1. Back in the Sale of Joseph, Yehudah had been the one to convince the brothers to sell Joseph to the Ishmaelites.
   2. Afterwards, he and the brothers had stripped Joseph of his coat; then, they slaughtered a goat and put its blood on that coat, they asked their father: *Haker na,* ‘Do you recognize this?’
   3. Father had in fact recognized that coat, and came to the anguished, but mistaken, conclusion his beloved son had been killed.
4. So, right after the Sale of Joseph – we get the story of Judah and Tamar.
   1. It’s not a digression- *It is where Groundhog Day starts.* In it, Judah is getting a chance to replay crucial aspects of his own behavior in the Sale of Joseph story; and hopefully, to make better choices this time.
   2. Some of these choices involve goats and coats. For example, Judah is asked for a goat by Tamar, and when he says he doesn’t have one, he gives her his coat, instead – only to have Tamar, later on, challenge him, with a question about that coat.
   3. A question that Judah would have cause to remember wel*l: ָנא-רכֶּ ַה*, do you recognize this?

### Judah Redeems Himself

1. That, of course, is the same question Judah once forced upon his father.
   1. *Rashi*, quoting the *Midrash*, points this out.



* 1. And the significance of that, sorta hits you in the face: The first time around, Judah had said *haker na* to force a *false* recognition upon his father – the falsehood that Joseph, Jacob’s beloved child is dead.
  2. This time, Yehudah must answer the question he once posed… whose coat is this; do you recognize it – and he must answer it *truthfully*.

1. Judah’s successful recognition that it *his* coat in Tamar’s hands – that admission ends up being heroic.
   1. By making that recognition, Judah owns up to his own part in an embarrassing scandal. And, spoiler alert: Through that courageous act, Judah ends up actually saving the lives of his own unborn children.
   2. So if you add it all up… the man who once forced upon his father a *false* recognition that his beloved child had died, now makes a heroic, *true* recognition that keeps his own children very much *alive*.
2. I t was Judah’s *Groundhog Day*.
   1. Through his interactions with Tamar, Judah found a way to confront and replay his own, problematic, actions in the Sale of Joseph.
   2. And when he did it *right* this time, he was able, in some way to redeem his past, to clear his way to move forward in life.

### Potiphar

1. So now let’s move on to the next episode in the Joseph saga, the Potiphar Story. Here, we encounter Groundhog Day, Part II. Groundhog Day not for Judah… but for Joseph.
   1. Back at the pit, Joseph lost a coat, and he descended into a hole in the ground.
   2. And, in *this* story, he loses his coat again- this time to Mrs. Potiphar, and he also descends into a hole in the ground.
   3. He is imprisoned in the royal dungeons. And lest you say, come on Fohrman – a dungeon isn’t a pit, you can’t compare those two holes in the ground. Well, later on,

when Joseph comes out of the dungeon, look what the Torah calls it: רוֹבַּה-מן Pharaoh took him out of the… pit.

. ְוי ִרי ֻצהוּ

* 1. It’s like the Torah itself seems to be going out of its way to set this up as a replay of the original “sale of Joseph, Joseph in pit” story.

1. So, it like the events of the sale are happening all over again. Except, this time, there’s one crucial difference: Back at the pit, the coat was forcibly stripped off of Joseph.
   1. This time, he *chooses* to leave it behind.
   2. Put yourself in Joseph’s shoes, if you would, right at the moment that Mrs. Potiphar grabs him by the coat. Your only way out of this situation, with your integrity intact, is to quite literally to slip out of that coat and leave it in her hands. And, imagine what that choice must have been like...
   3. It must have been a terrible choice, a terrible deja vu moment.
   4. Joseph, still suffering from PTSD from the first time his coat was grabbed and stripped off him, still traumatized from the first time he was thrust into a pit – now finds himself replaying those awful moments. *It feels just like last time.*
   5. And, as she takes hold of his coat, and as it dawns on him what refusing her advances would mean – *she’d be furious and could use that coat as evidence against him!* – every fiber of his being must have been crying out: *“Never again!” Never again will I allow myself to lose a coat and face the pit. Never again will I allow people to lie about me to father or the father-like person whose trusted me.* All I need to do is give in to her, and this nightmare all goes away.



1. But Joseph, to his immense credit, does not do that.
   1. He overcomes that voice. Heroically, he chooses to slip out of his coat – keeping his integrity intact. Now, he will pay for that choice by being thrown into the dungeon. He *will* go back to the pit.
   2. But it is different this time. He is not a victim anymore. Yes, once upon a time, a coat was stripped off him, and he no choice in the matter.
   3. But now he *chooses* the pit, proactively. In doing that, in a deep way, he has, replayed his past – he’s redeemed it.

### Replaying The Past, Redemptively

1. How, exactly, has Joseph redeemed his past?
   1. Truthfully, it is not just a matter of shedding his sense of victimhood; acting proactively rather than passively. It is more than that.
   2. Joseph is *fixing* something, something he did, that contributed to the ‘perfect storm’ of his sale. Because if you think about it, the brothers anger at Joseph wasn’t entirely inexplicable. Joseph *contributed* to the maelstrom of resentment that swirled around him.
   3. Look at the very first verses of the Joseph story, the Torah says that when Joseph was seventeen years old: *Joseph brought bad reports of them back to their father.*
   4. Now, why would Joseph have done that? The answer to that depends who you ask.
      1. If you asked seventeen-year old Joseph himself, he’d probably tell you he was doing it out of loyalty to his father: *Dad needs to understand all the bad stuff my brothers are doing.* In his own mind, his purposes were high-minded.
      2. But that’s not, evidently, how the brothers saw it. They may well have seen somebody, one of their own, their own brother, betraying them. They saw someone who was cultivating his relationship with father at their expense.
   5. Who was right? We don’t really know for sure – but look at the word the Torah uses to describe Joseph’s actions here.
      1. Isn’t it interesting… that the word is *Dibah*. *Dibah* in Hebrew is not a nice word.
      2. One of the only other times it appears is in *Sefer Bamidba*r, where that word *dibah* characterizes the slanderous reports the spies brought back about the Land of Israel.
      3. In using *dibah* to describe Joseph’s reports, the Torah seems to suggest the brothers might have had a point in viewing Joseph as spying upon them; as slandering them.
      4. On the outside, Joseph *looks* like he’s loyal to his father; but does actuality match appearances?
2. Well, if Joseph’s loyalty towards his father might have been flawed somewhat back when he was seventeen, does he ever get a second chance – a chance to do something about that flaw?
   1. And the answer may very well be yes: In *Groundhog Day*.
   2. Because in the Potiphar story, Joseph once again finds himself second in charge to a man who is master of the household. It is not his father this time, but a man who has been good to him, who has been, maybe, *like* a father to him: Potiphar.
   3. And then, just like before, tension developed between Joseph and other members of the household – this time, not his brothers, but Potiphar’s wife.
   4. And finally, as the Potiphar story barrels towards its conclusion, we find Joseph faced with a very uncomfortable choice – a choice that has to do, curiously, with the meaning of loyalty.



* 1. *What would you do, if the only way you could express loyalty to someone who is important to you, is by seeming to betray him?*

### Superficial Betrayal; Deeper Loyalty

1. That’s the choice. You see, when Mrs. Potiphar grabs hold of Joseph's coat and simply will no longer take no for an answer – Joseph faces a clarifying choice.
   1. It is as if fate is asking him: What kind of a loyalist are you, *really*?
   2. Back when you were seventeen, you were reporting bad things about your brothers to your father. You *say* you were loyal. But was that *real* loyalty, or only superficial, counterfeit, loyalty? Did your father *really* need to know, or were you just looking to curry favor in his eyes?
   3. Well, here’s your chance to replay that story.
      1. If you are superficially loyal and *that is all,* if that’s all you *really* care about is just looking good in the eyes of those in power – well, you can't go wrong by giving in to Mrs. Potiphar.
      2. Joseph will be intimate with her, betraying his master – and Potiphar will never be the wiser.
      3. Joseph will keep up the *appearance* of loyalty to his master quite well, answering his every request with impeccable politeness and grace, even as he, in actuality, betrays him.
      4. But to express *true* loyalty to Potiphar – well, the only way you can do *that,* unfortunately, is by seeming to betray him. You have to literally slip out of that coat she's holding and run outside – leaving open the possibility, the *probability*, that the woman you leave behind will frame you in the eyes of her husband. The man who had trusted you will *think* you betrayed him. He will never know the truth about how worthy you were of the trust he placed in you.
2. There was a time, back when he was seventeen, when Joseph may have chosen the appearance of loyalty over the real thing.
   1. But he would not repeat that mistake a second time. No, this time, in the Potiphar story, he would choose authentic loyalty.
   2. In the short term, it gets him thrown in a pit – but authentic loyalty, integrity, has a way of shining through.

### Pharaoh

1. For Joseph, it took years for that to happen. But eventually it did.
   1. Years later, Joseph would find himself hauled out of prison by Pharaoh.
   2. Back at the original pit, Joseph had been thrown into a hole in the ground after first losing his nice new clothes and being sent away from father.
   3. But now? Now, a new man draw him near, and doesn’t send him away. This man would give him beautiful new clothes, not take them away. This man would draw Joseph out of a hole in the ground, not put him in one. That man was Pharaoh.
2. Pharaoh gives him a new name, gives him a job, gives him a wife – as a father might.
   1. It is as if God is providing an anguished Yosef a surrogate father who can somehow salve his wounds. If Joseph ever wondered, as he was being dragged by the Ishmaelites down to Egypt, *where was my father when all these terrible things happened to me* … if Joseph ever had the sense that perhaps his family, perhaps even his father, had kicked him out of the family – the salve for that wound comes in the form of... another father-like man



who somehow, seems to do everything right. Who somehow makes everything better. Pharaoh.

1. But stop and ask this: What *was* it about Joseph that impressed Pharaoh?
   1. That made him act so fatherlike to Joseph? What was it about Joseph that was so compelling to the Egyptian king?
   2. The answer, I think, is loyalty. True loyalty.

### Loyalty Makes Joseph King

1. You see, when Pharaoh first met Joseph, in the moments after he hauled him out of the dungeons, the Egyptian king had badly needed to know the meaning of a troubling set of dreams.
   1. He told Joseph: I heard about you, that you know how to interpret dreams.
   2. And, if you were Joseph at that moment, desperate to get out of prison, you might have said to Pharaoh: “Sure, I’ve interpreted a few dreams in my day. Run one by me”. But that’s not what Joseph said. He said…: ָדי ﬠָ ְל בִּ. It’s not me. I have no independent power

to do as you say. ֹעה ְר פּ

את-ְשׁלוֹם

ֶנה ﬠֲ ַי ,ִהיםÄֱא. God will interpret Pharaoh’s dream.

1. Joseph was loyal to Father- to a Father in Heaven.
   1. And so, maybe he could be someone whom Pharaoh could trust… to be loyal to him, too. It’s not coincidental, probably, that when Pharaoh promotes Joseph, just a few verses later, places him in charge over all of Egypt, he remembers what Joseph says about God.
   2. He actually quotes Joseph’s own words, expressing that loyalty, right back to him.
   3. Pharoah remembers Joseph’s *biladai*- its not me, he remembers his loyalty.

### The Turning Point

1. In the end, Joseph’s loyalty in the presence of Pharaoh – his trustworthiness – saves him from the pit, from the royal dungeons.
   1. It is the key to his rise, to his eventual greatness. Once upon a time, Yosef might have tried to rely on counterfeit loyalty to impress a father.
   2. Now, it’s true loyalty – towards a Father in Heaven – is what impresses this new father in his life, Pharaoh, and makes him a king. Where did that come from?
2. The seeds for that loyalty-infused declaration of Yosef – *biladai*! – which Yosef says so naturally, without even planning it – they were planted long before Joseph ever met Pharaoh.
   1. They were planted at the moment Joseph made the decision to enter that hole in the ground, to enter the royal dungeons, in the first place.
   2. They were planted the moment he chose to slip out of his coat – the moment he replayed the terrible events of his own sale, redemptively. They were planted during Joseph’s version of Groundhog Day.
3. To others, watching Joseph’s dizzying rise to power in Pharaoh’s court would have seemed strange.
   1. It would have seemed sudden. A Hebrew slave… suddenly rises to inexplicable greatness. But mere onlookers… they don’t have the perspective the Torah gives us, the reader of the Torah.
   2. We come to understand that Joseph, had in truth, risen to greatness long before. He did so at the moment he faced the pit... and didn’t flinch. He did so on *Groundhog Day*



Hi everybody, this is Rabbi David Fohrman, and welcome to Parshat Miketz. You are watching

. So last week we talked about a strange pattern that seems to exist in the Joseph saga.

The

Backstory

Behind

Joseph's

Journey

From

Pit to

Palace

As the saga unfolds, we keep on hearing these echoes… Various aspects of the original ‘sale of Joseph story’ seem to be coming back to haunt each of the succeeding episodes: Judah and his interaction with Tamar; Joseph and Potiphar’s wife; Joseph and Pharaoh – each of these interactions seem to bear the unmistakable hallmarks of Joseph’s sale. The question was why?

So I began to suggest a possible explanation. Kind of like that weatherman in the Groundhog Day film, the protagonists of the Joseph story seem condemned to live through various replays, of sorts, of the sale of Joseph story – until somehow, things can turn out right; until somehow, each protagonist can sort of fix his part in the ‘perfect storm’ that was Joseph’s Sale. This week, I want to show you how that actually might be so.

Let’s start with the Yehudah and Tamar story. Back in the sale of Joseph, Yehudah had been the one to convince the brothers to sell Joseph to the Ishmaelites. Afterwards, he and the brothers had stripped Joseph of his coat; then, they slaughtered a goat and put its blood on that coat, they asked their father: Haker na, ‘Do you recognize this?’

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Some of these choices involve goats and coats. For example, Judah is asked for a goat by Tamar, and when he says he doesn’t have one, he gives her his coat instead – only to have Tamar, later on, challenge him, with a question about that coat. A question that Judah would have cause to remember well:

,ָא נ הַכֶּרdo you recognize this?

That, of course, is the same question Judah once forced upon his father. Rashi, quoting the Midrash, points this out. And the significance of that sorta hits you in the face: The first time around, Judah had said haker na to force a false recognition upon his father – the falsehood that Joseph, Jacob’s beloved child, is dead.

This time, Yehudah must answer the question he once posed: whose coat is this, do you recognize it? And he must answer it truthfully.

Now is not the time for a really detailed analysis of the Judah and Tamar episode – we actually do have a

full course on Aleph Beta that explores this fascinating story; you can click below the video here to get to it – but without giving too much away, let’s just say that Judah’s successful recognition that it's his coat in Tamar’s hands, that admission ends up being heroic.

By making that recognition, Judah owns up to his own part in an embarrassing scandal. And, spoiler alert: Through that courageous act, Judah ends up actually saving the lives of his own unborn children.

So if you add it all up… the man who once forced upon his father a false recognition that his beloved child had died, now makes a heroic, true recognition that keeps his own children very much alive.

It was Judah’s Groundhog Day. Through his interactions with Tamar, Judah found a way to confront and replay his own, problematic, actions in the sale of Joseph. And when he did it right this time, he was able, in some way to redeem his past, to clear his way to move forward in life.

Joseph

Gets

Thrown

into

a Pit... Again

So now let’s move on to the next episode in the Joseph saga: the Potiphar Story. Here, we encounter Groundhog Day, Part II. Groundhog Day not for Judah… but for Joseph.

Back at the pit, Joseph lost a coat, and he descended into a hole in the ground. And, in this story, he loses his coat again – this time to Mrs. Potiphar, and he also descends into a hole in the ground. He is imprisoned in the royal dungeons.

And lest you say, come on Fohrman, a dungeon isn’t a pit, you can’t compare those two holes in the ground; well, later on, when Joseph comes out of the dungeon, look what the Torah calls it:

.הַבּור ּמִן ִריצֻהו ְ וַיPharaoh took him out of the… pit. It's like the Torah itself seems to be going out of its way to set this up as a replay of the original “sale of Joseph, Joseph in pit,” story.

So, it like the events of the sale are happening all over again. Except, this time, there’s one crucial difference: back at the pit, the coat was forcibly stripped off of Joseph. This time, he chooses to leave it behind:

וַי ַ ּעֲזֹב בִּג ְדו בְּי ָ ָדהּ, וַי ָ ּנ ָס וַי ֵ ּצֵא הַחו ּצָה

He left his coat in her hands and ran outside…

Put yourself in Joseph’s shoes, if you would, right at the moment that Mrs. Potiphar grabs him by the coat. Your only way out of this situation, with your integrity intact, is to quite literally slip out of that coat and leave it in her hands. And, imagine what that choice must have been like...

It must have been a terrible choice, a terrible deja vu moment. Joseph – still suffering from PTSD from the first time his coat was grabbed and stripped off him, still traumatized from the first time he was thrust into a pit – now finds himself replaying those awful moments. It feels just like last time.

And, as she takes hold of his coat, and as it dawns on him what refusing her advances would mean – she’d be furious and could use that coat as evidence against him! – every fiber of his being must have been crying out: “Never again!” Never again will I allow myself to lose a coat and face the pit. Never again will I allow people to lie about me to father or the father-like person whose trusted me. All I need to do is give in to her, and this nightmare all goes away.

But Joseph, to his immense credit, does not do that. He overcomes that voice. Heroically, he chooses to slip out of his coat – keeping his integrity intact.

Now, he will pay for that choice by being thrown into the dungeon. He will go back to the pit. But it is different this time. He is not a victim anymore.

Joseph's

Lesson

of Redemption in the Pit

Yes, once upon a time, a coat was stripped off him, and he no choice in the matter. But now he chooses the pit, proactively. In doing that, in a deep way, he has replayed his past – he’s redeemed it.

How, exactly, has Joseph redeemed his past? Truthfully, it is not just a matter of shedding his sense of victimhood – acting proactively rather than passively. It is more than that. Joseph is fixing something, something he did, that contributed to the ‘perfect storm’ of his sale.

Because if you think about it, the brothers' anger at Joseph wasn’t entirely inexplicable. Joseph contributed to the maelstrom of resentment that swirled around him.

Look at the very first verses of the Joseph story, the Torah says that when Joseph was 17 years old:

רע ֖ה אֲבִיה ֽם׃אֶל־

דבָּת ֥םאֶת־

ס ֛ף

וַי ָ ּ ֵב ֥א יו

Joseph brought bad reports of them back to their father.

Now, why would Joseph have done that? The answer to that depends on who you ask.

If you asked 17-year old Joseph himself, he’d probably tell you he was doing it out of loyalty to his father: Dad needs to understand all the bad stuff my brothers are doing. In his own mind, his purposes were high-minded.

But that’s not, evidently, how the brothers saw it. They may well have seen somebody, one of their own, their own brother, betraying them. They saw someone who was cultivating his relationship with father at their expense.

Who was right? We don’t really know for sure – but look at the word the Torah uses to describe Joseph’s actions here. Isn’t it interesting… that the word is dibah. Dibah in hebrew is not a nice word. One of the only other times it appears is in Sefer Bamidbar, where that word dibah characterizes the slanderous

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In using dibah to describe Joseph’s reports, the Torah seems to suggest the brothers might have had a point in viewing Joseph as spying upon them – as slandering them. On the outside, Joseph looks like he’s loyal to his father, but does actuality match appearances?

Well, if Joseph’s loyalty towards his father might have been flawed somewhat back when he was 17, does he ever get a second chance – a chance to do something about that flaw? And the answer may very well be yes: In Groundhog Day. Because in the Potiphar story, Joseph once again finds himself second-in- charge to a man who is master of the household.

It is not his father this time, but a man who has been good to him, who has been, maybe, like a father to him: Potiphar. And then, just like before, tension developed between Joseph and other members of the household – this time, not his brothers, but Potiphar’s wife.

And finally, as the Potiphar story barrels towards its conclusion, we find Joseph faced with a very uncomfortable choice – a choice that has to do, curiously, with the meaning of loyalty.

What would you do, if the only way you could express loyalty to someone who is important to you, is by seeming to betray him? That’s the choice.

Loyalty

Gets

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You see, when Mrs. Potiphar grabs hold of Joseph's coat and simply will no longer take no for an answer, Joseph faces a clarifying choice. It is as if fate is asking him: What kind of a loyalist are you, really?

Back when you were 17, you were reporting bad things about your brothers to your father. You say you were loyal. But was that real loyalty, or only superficial, counterfeit, loyalty? Did your father really need to know, or were you just looking to curry favor in his eyes?

Well, here’s your chance to replay that story. If you are superficially loyal and that is all, if that’s all you really care about – is just looking good in the eyes of those in power – well, you can't go wrong by giving in to Mrs. Potiphar. Joseph will be intimate with her, betraying his master – and Potiphar will never be the wiser. Joseph will keep up the appearance of loyalty to his master quite well, answering his every request with impeccable politeness and grace, even as he, in actuality, betrays him.

But to express true loyalty to Potiphar, well, the only way you can do that, unfortunately, is by seeming to betray him. You have to literally slip out of that coat she's holding and run outside, leaving open the possibility, the probability, that the woman you leave behind will frame you in the eyes of her husband.

The man who had trusted you will think you betrayed him. He will never know the truth about how worthy you were of the trust he placed in you.

There was a time, back when he was 17, when Joseph may have chosen the appearance of loyalty over the real thing. But he would not repeat that mistake a second time.

No, this time, in the Potiphar story, he would choose authentic loyalty. In the short term, it gets him thrown in a pit – but authentic loyalty, integrity, has a way of shining through.

Pharaoh Saves

Joseph

from

the Pit

For Joseph, it took years for that to happen. But eventually, it did. Years later, Joseph would find himself hauled out of prison by Pharaoh.

Back at the original pit, Joseph had been thrown into a hole in the ground after first losing his nice new clothes and being sent away from father.

But now? Now, a new man draws him near, and doesn’t send him away. This man would give him beautiful new clothes, not take them away. This man would draw Joseph out of a hole in the ground, not put him in one. That man was Pharaoh.

Pharaoh gives him a new name, gives him a job, gives him a wife – as a father might. It is as if God is providing an anguished Yosef a surrogate father who can somehow salve his wounds. If Joseph ever wondered, as he was being dragged by the Ishmaelites down to Egypt, where was my father when all these terrible things happened to me?… if Joseph ever had the sense that perhaps his family, perhaps even his father, had kicked him out of the family, the salve for that wound comes in the form of... another father-like man who somehow, seems to do everything right; who somehow makes everything better: Pharaoh.

But stop and ask this: What was it about Joseph that impressed Pharaoh, that made him act so father-like to Joseph? What was it about Joseph that was so compelling to the Egyptian king?

The answer, I think, is loyalty – true loyalty.

Loyalty

Makes

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Rise

from

Pit to

Palace

You see, when Pharaoh first met Joseph, in the moments after he hauled him out of the dungeons, the Egyptian king had badly needed to know the meaning of a troubling set of dreams. He told Joseph: I heard about you, that you know how to interpret dreams. And, if you were Joseph at that moment, desperate to get out of prison, you might have said to Pharaoh: “Sure, I’ve interpreted a few dreams in my day. Run one by me.”

But that’s not what Joseph said. He said: .בִּלְעָדיIt’s not me. I have no independent power to do as you

dream. Pharaoh’s interpret will Godאֱלֹהִים, י ַעֲנ ֶה אֶת שְׁלום פרעֹה. say.

Joseph was loyal to Father – to a Father in Heaven. And so, maybe he could be someone whom Pharaoh

could trust… to be loyal to him, too. It’s not coincidental, probably, that when Pharaoh promotes Joseph, just a few verses later – places him in charge over all of Egypt – he remembers what Joseph says about God. He actually quotes Joseph’s own words, expressing that loyalty, right back to him:

א ֥ ֶרץבְּכָל־ מִצְרֽי ִם

רג ְלווְאֶת־

א ֧ישׁ י ָדואֶת־

אֲנִ ֣י פַרעֹ֑ה ו ּבִלְעד֗יךָ י ָ ִר֨יםלֹֽא־

I am Pharaoh; yet – biladecha – without you, no one shall lift up hand or foot in all the land of Egypt…

Pharaoh remembers Joseph’s biladai – it's not me – he remembers his loyalty.

Joseph's

Lessons

from

His Experiences in the Pit

In the end, Joseph’s loyalty in the presence of Pharaoh – his trustworthiness – saves him from the pit, from the royal dungeons. It is the key to his rise, to his eventual greatness.

Once upon a time, Yosef might have tried to rely on counterfeit loyalty to impress a father. Now, it's true loyalty – towards a Father in Heaven – is what impresses this new father in his life, Pharaoh, and makes him a king. Where did that come from?

The seeds for that loyalty-infused declaration of Yosef – biladai, which Yosef says so naturally, without even planning it – they were planted long before Joseph ever met Pharaoh.

They were planted at the moment Joseph made the decision to enter that hole in the ground, to enter the royal dungeons, in the first place. They were planted the moment he chose to slip out of his coat – the moment he replayed the terrible events of his own sale, redemptively. They were planted during Joseph’s version of Groundhog Day.

To others, watching Joseph’s dizzying rise to power in Pharaoh’s court would have seemed strange. It would have seemed sudden. A Hebrew slave suddenly rises to inexplicable greatness. But mere onlookers, they don’t have the perspective the Torah gives us, the reader of the Torah.

We come to understand that Joseph, had in truth, risen to greatness long before. He did so at the moment he faced the pit... and didn’t flinch. He did so on Groundhog Day.

David: Welcome to Parshat Miketz. In the second half of Genesis, we've seen a lot of deception: Jacob, Laban, Simeon and Levi, Jacob's sons, Judah and Tamar.

Finally, in Parshat Vayeishev, Judah started to turn the tide. He was willing to admit the truth to Tamar, when it would've been easy to cover it up. He began to correct his mistakes.

Immanuel: But there are two parts to change. There's correcting the flaw within yourself... and that's what Judah did. But there's another element: when there are people who got hurt from what you did, it's not enough to just improve your character. Real transformation means being able to repair the damaged relationship as well.

Did

Joseph

Truly

Forgive

His

Brothers?

David: After the sale of Joseph, if Judah and his brothers really wanted to correct what they did, they were gonna have to, somehow, repair their relationship with Joseph.

Now, we all know how the story ends. The brothers go to Egypt to get food, and Joseph reveals himself to his brothers. They all cry, they hug and kiss… it seems like they reconcile. It's a happy ending.

Immanuel: But... that's not really what happens. At least not right away. Yeah, the brothers go down to Egypt and speak to the unrecognizable Joseph… but Joseph does NOT reveal himself right away.

There's a whole saga of events that Joseph puts the brothers through before he comes clean.

Joseph accuses them of being spies, takes Simeon captive until the brothers prove that they're not lying, he plants money in their bags… and the climax of the story is when Joseph frames Benjamin by placing a goblet in Benjamin's sack and accuses him of stealing it.

David: What's going on here? Why doesn't Joseph just reveal his identity right away? Why does he put them through all of this?

Immanuel: We'll explore the fascinating story both this week AND next week, on the Parsha Experiment.

David: Hi, I'm David Block. Immanuel: and I'm Imu Shalev.

The

Story of

Joseph's

Brothers

in Egypt

David: And welcome to the Parsha Experiment. As always, let's bring up our 20-second parsha recap.

Pharaoh has dreams, and he releases Joseph from prison to interpret them. Joseph predicts predicts famine and he's appointed second in command.

The brothers go to Egypt to get food, and Joseph accuses them of being spies. He demands that they bring Benjamin, and he takes Simeon as captive.

Jacob won't allow Benjamin to go, until Judah takes responsibility for him.

The brothers go back to Egypt, but as they leave, Benjamin is framed for the theft of Joseph's goblet.

David: Each stage of the interaction has its own fascinating and complex story to tell. While we can't get to all of it in this video – you can explore it together with Rabbi Fohrman in a course linked below.

Immanuel: We are going to explore the dramatic tale of the theft of Joseph's goblet. It may be the key to understanding the whole interaction. So let's read it together, and play our favorite game – where have heard these words or ideas before?

Parallels to

the

Story of

Joseph

and His

Brothers

in the Bible

David: After the brothers get food and are set to leave Egypt, Joseph commands his steward to plant his

goblet in Benjamin's bag. Once the brothers are a few minutes away, Joseph says: ָשׁים הָאֲנ אַחֲרי רדֹף ם– go and chase after those men!

קו ּ

Immanuel: And it's not just that he chased them. Joseph says: ְתָּם וְהִשׂג– and you'll catch up with them.

David: Wow, this sounds so familiar. Jacob and his family left Laban's home, and when Laban heard, אַחֲריו ְרדֹּף ּ ִ וַי– he chased after them. And then: ַעֲקֹב י אֶת ,לָבָן ּשׂג ּ ַ וַי– Laban caught up to Jacob.

Immanuel: And it's not just the fact that the chasing is the same. The words that the Torah uses are also the same! ,והשגתם...רדףand .וישג...וירדף

David: So maybe that's just a coincidence. One parallel is not enough to convincingly connect the stories, so let's see if we can find a little bit more.

Joseph tells to his steward: When you catch up to them, deliver the following message:

During that! at look you Would evil? with good repaid you have why –לָמָּה שִׁלַּמְתֶּם רעָה תַּחַת טובָה

Laban's chase, God appeared to him in a prophecy, and said: לְךָ הִשׁמֶר– be careful, Laban.

פן תְּדבֵּר עִם י ַעֲקֹב

רע –

עַד ֹוב מִטּ; not to say anything to Jacob, good or evil.

Let's see if there's more. Joseph continues in his instructions to his steward; say to the brothers: "This is my master's goblet, בּו ַחֵשׁ ְנ י ַחֵשׁ נ ,ּא וְהו– and he uses it for divination!"

Immanuel: There are actually two connections. When Laban caught up with Jacob, he accused Jacob of stealing his terafim – his idols. But many of the commentators say that the terafim were actually something that Laban used for divination. Interesting... Joseph accuses the brothers of stealing something used for divination… just like Laban accused Jacob of stealing something used for divination.

David: But there's a textual connection here too. When Jacob was getting ready to leave Laban's place,

Laban said: ְלָלֶךָ בִּג ְהוָה י ִי ְברכֵנ וַי ,ִחַשׁתִּי נ– I have used divination, and found that God has blessed me because of you. That's that same word that Joseph used – בּו ַחֵשׁ ְנ י ַחֵשׁ נ– he used the goblet for divination.

Immanuel: Let's see if there are any more connections. When the brothers were accused of stealing the goblet, Judah was so confident that it was a false accusation that he said: וָמֵת ,מֵעֲבָדיךָ אִתּו ִמָּצֵא י אֲשֶׁר– with whomever you find the goblet shall die.

Does anything like that happen in the Laban story? When Jacob's accused of taking Laban's terafim, Jacob is also extremely confident that the accusation was false: ֶה ִחְי י לֹא ,אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֶת תִּמְצָא אֲשֶׁר עִם– with whomever you find the terafim shall not live. The brothers here responded to the accusation just as Jacob had.

From

Joseph's

Oldest

Brother to

the

Youngest

David: And the parallels continue. When Joseph's steward searches for the goblet: ְחפשׂ וַי– כִּלָּה ּבַקּטֹן ו ,הֵחֵל ָּדול בַּג… He searches starting with the oldest and ending with the youngest.

Laban and –וַי ָ ּבֹא לָבָן בְּאֹהֶל י ַעֲקֹב ו ּבְאֹהֶל לֵאָה traphim: his for searched Laban how at look now And

tent Leah's left he and –וַי ֵ ּצֵא מֵאֹהֶל לֵאָה, וַי ָ ּבֹא בְּאֹהֶל רחֵל tent. Leah's to then and tent Jacob's to went

and went to Rachel's. Laban also searched his oldest daughter first and finished with the youngest.

Immanuel: It really does seem that the connection is real. Why are these parallels to Laban here? What are supposed to learn from them?

David: If we line up the parallels, we'll find something creepy: Joseph is the new Laban character – he's deceiving his brothers like Laban deceived Jacob.

Immanuel: But how could that be? Joseph's a good guy… and Laban's a bad guy!

The

Brothers'

Jealously of

Joseph

David: It seems like the Torah is trying to teach us a lesson. This story that we have always learned as good guys versus bad guys is actually much more nuanced and complex than we thought. Like we learned in the story of Dinah and Shechem, the brothers' jealousy of Joseph was not random, it came from a place of hurt and rejection over being children of the unloved wife.

Immanuel: And now Joseph, finally in a position of power over the very brothers who victimized him, is faced with his own challenge, one that we've already seen in Jacob's family: How do you deal with being mistreated, with being unfavored? Will you confront openly and honestly? Or will you deceive in order to make things fair again?

David: Jacob deceived his father and brother when he felt he deserved the blessings. Simeon and Levi

deceived Shechem to save Dinah when they felt that they – Leah's children – were being treated as Jacob's second fiddle. That feeling of being unfavored next to Rachel's sons also led the brothers to deceive with the sale of Joseph.

Why Did

Joseph's

Brothers

Hate Him?

Immanuel: And now something similar seems to be happening with Joseph himself. We seem to have a role reversal here. If we asked: was Joseph favored or unfavored, we'd all say, he was Jacob's favorite!

David: But that's only one side of the story. To his father, he was the favorite, but the text tells us that his brothers hated him, vayisanu oto – that's the very same word used to describe how Leah was hated.

Vayar ashem ki senuah Lah, God saw that Leah was hated.

Now, Joseph has to face the challenge of being unfavored. When Joseph sees his brothers for the first time since the sale, how will he react? Will he reveal himself and confront his brothers openly and honestly? Or will he he act as a vigilante and deceive his brothers in order to right the wrongs as he perceives them.

The

Lesson

Behind

Joseph's

Forgiveness of

His

Brothers

Immanuel: These parallels to Laban give us the answer. Joseph seems a bit bitter… maybe even a bit vengeful. He doesn't just reveal himself to his brothers. He plays around with them first. He scares them, he deceives them – in a sense, he becomes Laban.

David: There's another side to the Laban connection. If Joseph is Laban, then the brothers are playing the role of Jacob – they're the ones being deceived.

They first deceived with the sale of Joseph, and now they're being deceived… They're learning a lesson in empathy, what it feels like to go through it themselves. Jacob had to learn a similar lesson – he tasted what deceit really feels like when Laban switched Rachel and Leah.

Only after experiencing it himself – really, only after he could empathize – was Jacob able to reconcile with Esau. When Jacob finally meets up with Esau, he tells him "im Laban garti v'eichar ad ata" – I long- delayed confronting you, apologizing to you, but I dwelt with Laban and I finally realize what I have done to you.

That may be what's happening with the brothers too… before they reconcile, they must experience deceit themselves. They must go through a Laban-like experience before they can truly reconcile with Joseph.

Immanuel: And at the root of this terrible and emotional story is the lesson that in a relationship, there are no good guys and bad guys. It's never that simple. But learning to see both stories in your heart at once – yours and your brother's – is going to be the key to reconciliation.

The one thing we have to understand before we can fully appreciate the impending reconciliation is Benjamin's role in all of this. Joseph demanded that the brothers get Benjamin. It was Benjamin whom Joseph framed with the goblet. What does any of this have to do with the reconciliation between Joseph and his brothers?

David: Join us as we explore this next week, on the Parsha Experiment.