

## Parshat Miketz 5776

### MIKETZ AND THE POWER OF DREAMS

William Shakespeare wrote “We are such stuff As dreams are made on” Rabbi Shlomo Riskin puts his own slant on this quote by saying “We are the stuff that dreams are made of and that dreams truly express who we are”. This is what lies at the heart of this week’s Parasha.

Last week’s Parasha Vayeshev has Yoseph in prison together with the butler and baker who Pharaoh believes have both committed a crime. The butler dreams of vines with grapes on three branches. He squeezes the wine from the grapes and gives it to Pharaoh. The baker dreams of a basket of bread on his head with birds pecking at the three loaves it contains. Yoseph predicts that the butler will live and serve Pharaoh and that the baker will die and so it was.

But what was in the dreams that caused Yoseph to interpret the way he did? We dream what occupies our minds, souls and hearts and what we think of during the day. The butler dreams of service – he has no guilty conscience and gives wine to Pharaoh. The baker sees the birds taking something away – he feels guilty about something and indeed is found guilty and does not return to service.

In Miketz Pharaoh dreams that seven fat cows come out of the River Nile followed by seven skinny cows who devour the fat cows. He also dreams that seven healthy heads of grain sprout on a single stalk but are then swallowed by withered and scorched heads of grain. Yosef interprets the dreams to mean that Egypt will have seven years of plenty followed by seven years of famine.

Dr Naphtali Fish in his book “Nachas Ruach” notes that Sigmund Freud was of the opinion that “our dreams are the medium through which we are able to access the unconscious”. With this idea Dr Fish turns to the fact that Judaism holds great value to the power of dreams and that it recognises the existence of an unconscious mind. Dreams are essentially a window to our hearts and minds and often their message is one that we know, but cannot always bring to the surface.

This is exactly what transpired with Pharaoh – the message of the dreams was just beyond his reach. Regarding the dream, the verse states “... but no-one interpreted them for Pharaoh”. However, we know that cannot be the case because the previous verses clearly establish that the necromancers were brought forth, but that their interpretations were rejected (Bereshit 40:8).

Rashi explains that the wise men were summoned and did in fact interpret the dreams however their words were not to Pharaoh’s liking and fell on deaf ears. Why did Pharaoh reject them? According to Dr Fish “...one can assert that Pharaoh already knew the correct interpretation in his unconscious mind, but could not access it or recall it alone”. This answers why Pharaoh accepted Yoseph’s interpretation – because the words of the unknown Hebrew slave “clicked” within his heart and mind, and it was the one that allowed Pharaoh to recall that which he already knew in his unconscious.

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks highlights the significance of interpreting the dreams of others. Leaders interpret other people’s dreams. They find a way of expressing the hopes and fears of a generation. It was not Yoseph’s dreams that made him a leader; it was Pharaoh’s. Our own dreams give us direction; it is other people’s dreams that give us opportunity.

Yoseph does not just interpret the dreams he also has a plan to prepare for the lean years by salvaging grain from the good years. “Now therefore, let Pharaoh seek out a man both discerning and wise, and set him over the land of Egypt”. Yoseph provides a solution, with himself being the logical executor of that solution. Yoseph understood the divine possibility of him being in the right place at the right time.

Rabbi Shlomo Riskin writes that the word Mazal –luck, is spelt mem, zayin, lamed. The mem is Makom- place, and the zayin is Z’mán – time, one must be in the right place at the right time. But that is not sufficient. We also need the lamed, which is Limmud- learning. The individual who Hashem places in the right place at the right time must know, through learning, how to make the most of the moment. Yoseph made his own good luck and showed what it is to become a leader.

According to the Zohar, when we sleep, a portion of our soul leaves our body to connect to the unseen. Dreams, if experienced during deep sleep and properly interpreted, can be used as a powerful tool for us in our waking life. Yoseph had the ability to interpret what was hidden in dreams, to help the butler, the baker and Pharaoh find the truth that was deep in their unconscious. Yoseph was able to interpret others’ dreams and put them into action.

As Rabbi Sacks sums up. “Dream dreams, understand and articulate the dreams of others; and find ways of turning a dream into a reality”.