

## **Shabbat Miketz, Nov. 30, 2013: Sustainability and Connection**

Last week Reb Moshe spoke of the importance of dreams, not only those that emerge while we're asleep, but also waking dreams that inspire us to positively transform the world. Today I want to share a waking dream that I carry with me every day, one that just so happens to relate to dreams interpreted by Joseph about 4,000 years ago.

In this week's parsha, Miketz, Joseph interprets two dreams by Pharaoh that relate to a coming famine. Joseph recommends that Pharaoh set over Egypt a man discreet and wise, that he appoint overseers to gather a fifth of the harvests during the years of plenty, and that he store that food for the years of famine. In next week's parsha, Vayiggash, Joseph reunites with his family in the land of Goshen, their new home in Egypt, where he falls on Jacob's neck and sheds tears of joy. These two developments, one focused on laying the groundwork for a sustainable economy, the other extolling the joys of returning to one's roots, may seem unrelated, so I will use my allotted time to draw some lines of connection.

First, let's consider what it may take, in our time, to cultivate a truly sustainable economy. Whereas Joseph stored enough grain to sustain Egypt through seven years of famine, the US has done something similar when it comes to the engine of its economy, oil. To cope with severe oil shortages, the US Strategic Petroleum Reserve has stored enough oil in four sites in the Gulf of Mexico to sustain this country for 36 days. As of a year ago, the inventory was 694.9 million barrels, or 36 days of oil at current daily US consumption levels. Even if that oil turns out to be enough to get us through the worst of oil crises, what will we do in the long run, when supplies of relatively cheap, easily accessible oil run out? Or in the short run, if a natural disaster makes it impossible to transport oil from the Gulf of Mexico to other parts of the country?

As a matter of fact, this happened a little over a year ago. Within only three days after Hurricane Sandy's winds subsided, gas lines not seen since the 1970s formed across the New York metropolitan area. Sandy also downed countless trees, leaving millions without power. The hurricane drove home not only how vulnerable our built environment is to major storms, but also how much we've come to depend on distant suppliers for energy as well as for food, clothing, household goods, and other daily necessities. Ironically, this outsourcing habit is powered by the combustion of fossil fuels, which yield carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases linked to global climate change, which scientists peg as the likely cause of today's rising frequency of severe storms.

Angling to kick the outsourcing habit amid concerns about Peak Oil, a warming planet, and economic instability, some 24 groups throughout New England—part of 130 in the U.S. and 452 worldwide—are now insourcing instead. They're working to transform their communities into walkable, post-carbon "[Transition Towns](#)" that are well-prepared to survive and thrive without relying on nonrenewable fossil fuels. Raising awareness, collaborating with multiple

stakeholders, and taking concerted action, they're striving to build local resilience by empowering residents to produce and consume as much as possible of life's essentials as close as possible to where they live.

One such Transition initiative—the only one in Boston—is Jamaica Plain New Economy Transition ([JP NET](#)), a three-year-old organization I've spent some time with that has launched or supported several projects aimed at enabling JP to cultivate local, equitable, and sustainable agriculture; renewable energy and transportation systems; manufacturing and building; business & capital; and other critical community resources. Examples include the [Boston Bean](#), a JP NET-produced five dollar bill honored at selected JP merchants last winter to boost the local economy during the holiday season; [Egleston Community Orchard](#), a formerly vacant, crime-ridden lot that neighbors converted into a garden space where apple trees, raspberries, blueberries, chard, kale and other crops are grown sustainably; and [JP Green House](#), a passive solar-heated, highly insulated demonstration home near the Forest Hills T stop that maintains an average indoor temperature of 63 degrees in the winter.

As JP NET volunteers work together to advance these and similar initiatives, they are transforming their community into a greener, more neighborly place, where more and more people are engaging in meaningful work that enables themselves and future generations of residents to survive and thrive. By weaning JP off of nonrenewable fossil fuels, they are advancing not only a more sustainable economy but also a more cohesive and deeply rooted community that connects everyone to the land, people, and larger history of which they are a part.

Dakota Butterfield, coordinator of the Boston Bean and an activist for Legalize Chickens in Boston, observes that while fossil fuels, piped in from remote sources, have improved so-called living standards, they have also enabled the citizens of industrialized countries to live remarkably isolated lives, whether in their cars, cubicles, or single-family homes—rootless lives disconnected from the land and people that surround them. “We don't need each other anymore,” she laments. How sustainable is that?

Whereas Joseph singlehandedly commandeered the gathering and storage of seven years of grain in order to sustain Egypt, and made a personal decision to return to his roots, I believe our task is a communal one.

To really build sustainable economies in our time, we will need to work together in our communities not to store up dwindling resources that come to us from a distance, but to cultivate and promote local, renewable sources for food, energy, housing, transportation, commerce, culture, and more. Through this holy work of [shifting our cultural paradigm from globalization to relocalization](#), we can't help but sink deeper roots in the places we call home and emerge, in the end, with much richer personal and collective harvests. And more meaningful Thanksgivings! On that note, Shabbat shalom.

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