

Believing in the Power of Dreams

Last week we read part one of the saga of Joseph and his brothers, and we learned that he was favored by Jacob, and therefore despised by his brothers. Joseph shares two dreams with his brothers, one where his brothers are all sheaves of wheat bowing down to his sheaf, and in the other his siblings and parents are the sun, moon and stars, again all bowing down to him. These don't go over very well, and in the first opportunity that the brothers have alone with Joseph, away from their father, they throw him in a pit and then sell him into slavery. As they design their plot, they cackle to one another, "Then we'll see what becomes of his dreams!"

And indeed, what becomes of his dreams is quite extraordinary. He is sold into service in Egypt, but God protects him, and he ends up rising in power in Potiphar's home and becomes an authority of the household. After Potiphar's wife claims that he made sexual advances, he is put into Pharaoh's prison. He ends up accurately interpreting the dreams of his prisonmates, Pharaoh's royal cupbearer and his royal baker. Joseph asks the cupbearer to put in a good word for him to Pharaoh once he is released, which the cupbearer doesn't remember to do, or perhaps chooses not to do.

Fast forward to this week's episode of our drama, and two years have passed since this incident. Pharaoh has two vivid dreams, one where seven healthy cows are eaten by seven lean cows, and the other where seven good ears of corn are consumed by seven scorched ears of corn. None of Pharaoh's advisors can accurately interpret this dream, and Pharaoh is distressed. The chief cupbearer finally remembers Joseph, and talks up this skilled dream interpreter to Pharaoh. Joseph offers an interpretation to Pharaoh that these dreams are foretelling a famine in the land, and he offers a strategy for conserving food so that the people will not die from hunger. Pharaoh is impressed, and places Joseph in charge of this initiative.

In a classic example of biblical storytelling, his dreams land him in prison, and in a reversal of fate are the key to getting him out of prison.

The rest of the story can only unfold the way it does, with Joseph in a position of power over his brothers, because of his role as a dream interpreter.

There are two really important lessons that we can take from his experience.

First, we all have unique gifts, and we have to believe in them. Sometimes we need to learn how to control them, and this was certainly the case for Joseph. Maybe instead of using his talent to be obnoxious, he could have stepped forward to help interpret his brothers' dreams, or maybe he could have just kept a dream journal. But think what would have happened if he had just given up that skill. These dreams are seen as messages about God's plans, and by accepting his role as a conduit, Joseph saves thousands from famine and changes the course of history.

His life is a reminder to tap into our own passions and gifts and to use them for the best. And it's an important lesson of Hanukkah as well. The Maccabees fought for the right of the Jews to be who they are, and that remains just as important today.

There is a second takeaway from Joseph and his dreams, which is that without the cupbearer mentioning him to Pharaoh, Joseph would never have had the opportunity to play the role that he did. As skilled as Joseph is, he needed a person to actively connect him to Pharaoh to fulfill a need. This power of connection is something that we all have and that we can use to make a difference.

In that vein, I want to give a quick plug for a mentoring initiative that Hillel is starting, under the incredible leadership of our board member Dr. Iris Danziger. We have hundreds of students on campus who have special gifts – they are bright, they are ambitious, they are great with data, they are creative, you name it. And we have a community full of gifted and accomplished professionals. What we need to

keep things going is for you to know them, and the remember them. As Iris recently explained to me, and you should ask her about it, there are 50 ways to mentor, so whether it means a one-time coffee meeting, or a job shadowing day, or an internship opportunity, there are ways to connect to these students that will help them, and will help us. Please reach out to Iris or to me if you want to learn more.

May we all be blessed to find the power of our dreams and to use the gifts that God gave us in service of others. I hope that you and your families have a Shabbat Shalom and a Happy Hanukkah.