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In this week's Torah reading, we reach the climax of the story of Joseph in Egypt. Now viceroy of all Egypt, second in command to Pharaoh, Joseph meets his brothers, who at first do not know who he is. Only after toying with them, sending them back and forth from Egypt to Canaan, accusing them of theft and otherwise subjecting them to anxiety does Joseph reveal his identity to them. Unable to control his emotions, he says to his brothers simply "I am Joseph." His stunned brothers, having sold him into slavery years before, are speechless. Now, having come together again after so much evil had occurred between them, the family will find refuge in Egypt under the protection of the brother who had once been shunned.

That incident formed the backdrop to one of the most momentous events to occur in Catholic-Jewish relations. In 1962, Pope John XXIII called for the Second Vatican Council to meet; that conference grappled with many significant issues for the church, including permitting the change from Latin to vernacular languages. From a Jewish point of view, the most significant outcome of 'Vatican II,' as it came to be known, was the opening of a Catholic-Jewish dialogue based on mutual respect and the acknowledgement of past anti-Semitism within the church. Pope John had himself done much to fight for Jews in wartime Europe before and during the Shoah, and as Pope met personally with a Jewish delegation to Vatican II to begin a process of reconciliation. Born Angelo Giuseppe ('Joseph' in Italian) Roncalli, the Pope greeted the Jewish delegates with the words 'I am Joseph your brother.'

No better words could have symbolized the hoped-for rapprochement between Jews and Catholics. Just as the biblical Joseph and his brothers had been rent apart by their shared history, so too had the Christians and Jews, once siblings, become estranged. Centuries of violence against Jews, often permitted or even instigated by church leaders, had now given way to a call for peace and forgiveness. That process continued to flower under the leadership of Pope John Paul II, and in our time by the current pontiff, Pope Francis. The efforts of these Christian leaders have forever changed the relationship between our two peoples. Their leadership provides hope that it is never too late for religions to evolve and to reject the violence and hatred of the past. We wait with hope for the same reconciliation with our brother Ishmael.