

Parsha VaYeishev

Yosef the Tzadik and Dreamer

This Drash is dedicated to the memory of my Grandpa David whose Yahrzeit is this coming week. He survived the Shoah and still gave me his love and taught me about dreams.

My Mom recently taught me something I hadn't thought about much. She said that everyone has a destiny. A reason for our life on this planet. I would say most of us don't think about such things much. Especially given the hard times we are living through. But sure enough an event will happen that seems to catapult us in ways we couldn't imagine.

Parsha VaYayshev spends a great deal of time talking about the life of Yosef. Yosef is favored by his father and hated by his brothers. They hate him for good reason since he brings home bad reports about them. The Torah's first mention of a snitch.

Dreams play a significant part in not only this week's parsha but next weeks as well. The Talmud tells us that a dream not interpreted is like a letter that is not opened. Dreams in The Bible tend to be of two types. One type of dream is Divine inspiration and prophecy. We see this a lot in Chumash but especially in the Prophets. The second type of dream are ones where there are divine messages telling the dreamer what to do. Dreams can even affect our moods depending upon their content. We see this with the dreams of the Baker and Cup Bearer when Yosef is in prison. Joseph's ability to explain and interpret dreams is a precursor to the process of therapy and healing. (R' Avraham Trugman "The Mystical meaning of Dreams"). Perhaps it's the nature of dreams which fascinates us. After all dreams do not have boundaries or time restraints. When we dream, we have access to all sorts of events, stories and our own personal prophesies of what we are and what we can be. I have had more than a few dreams that changed my life and that challenged me to take the journey I am still on.

Yosef dreams are prophetic dreams. His dreams are ones that speak of his dominance over his brothers. It is hard to be sympathetic to Yosef at this moment. He receives a gift from Hashem but misuses it. The Ramban even describes Yakov's reaction to his son's dreams "It is but your conceit and youth that brings such matters in your heart." In the wake of all this, there is family anger towards Yosef. One wonders if his dreams are a gift after all

Yakov then tells Yosef to look for his brothers. He wanders looking for them until he meets a stranger. Rashi describes this stranger as an angel. We have met many strangers in our lives. Most made no apparent impact on our lives. But some did. They may have even pointed us in the right direction and sometimes said just the thing we needed to hear. Perhaps they were Angels.

"And a certain man found him and the man asked him 'what are you looking for?' The Kotzker Rebbe reads this as: 'What seek You? What REALLY are you looking for' He goes on to teach us: "The angel taught Yosef that whenever he was lost in knowing what to do with his life, especially in a time of

confusion or hardship, he should SEEK HIMSELF. The Kotzker Rebbe challenges us to look inside ourselves to that inner YOU or point of light. That's the place where we clarify what we really want in this life and what we should truly be striving for". Iteret Torah

Yosef eventually does meet his brothers, but their hate is so great "they are as if not his brothers" as Rashi describes them. After debating to murder their brother or sell him into slavery they decide to throw Yosef into a deep pit. A pit without water. Meaning a place devoid of wisdom and Torah.

A pit filled with dangerous scorpions and snakes. Worst of all "if he cries out for help there is no one to rescue him" (Rashi). Certainly poignant. 'Why is all this happening' we often ask? 'Hashem where are you?!' we cry out

Yosef's descent continues with his being sold into slavery in Egypt. Whereas dreams have no boundaries or restrictions, slavery and later on prison does. They are places where one has no space nor freedom. But the Torah then tells us : "Adony was with Yosef in all that he did". His Father must have shared his own memory that "Gd was in this place and I did not know it". Yosef unlike his Father DID realize and know Gd was with him at this point.

Yosef is sent to Jail after Potiphar's wife accuses him, emphasizing that the HEBREW slave made advances at her. He is thrown in Prison.

Rabbi Niles Elliot Goldstein in his book 'Gd At The Edge' writes about his own experience in the notorious Tombs prison in New York City. He describes his own unhappiness and rage at that time in his life. Despite the traumatic experience in the prison, he shares how he felt this descent became a way for him to explore himself (here again- the Inner You) and make real break throughs in his life. "Something does happen when our souls hit rock bottom, when we are trapped in prisons of our own making and which are not always constructed of iron or steel".

We see Yosef change in prison as well. While in prison, he displays compassion for others as when he notices how upset the cupbearer and baker are after having 'bad' dreams. In one of the most beautiful pasuks in the Torah Yosef tells them "Surely G-d can interpret! Tell me your dreams". There seems to have been a transformation. His conceit when he was younger now has been transformed into a love for others.

Yosef interprets the dreams of the Baker and cup bearer. But Yosef makes sure the cupbearer will put in a good word to Pharoah and secure his release. The last line in the parsha tells us the cupbearer did not remember Yosef or his request. A lot of Commentators are critical of Yosef for relying on the cupbearer and not Hashem. To me, Yosef seems all too human though in asking for his help.

I think we can all relate to Joseph. He is young and cocky and then ventures out into the world and encounters strange people and events that brings him to places and situations he could never imagine. He goes through the anger of family members and being lost in a pit helpless and afraid. He loses himself, and becomes a slave to others. Suddenly a spark of light reaches him... and sometimes us. When we see other people dream we help them understand. We take the pain of others and show them how to get to know themselves. Yosef found his destiny and I think he also teaches us how to find ours. Our life, this journey we partake, is filled with unexpected twists and turns. We need to listen to our dreams, our inner YOU and be humble and simply let the light in. A Freylacha Hanukah n Gut Shabbos!