

Shabbat Vayechi 5782 - When Dreams Intersect  
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Shabbat Shalom!

It's impossible to tell the story of Joseph and his brothers without repeatedly mentioning the following word: "dream." Dreams are simply all over the story. For an example, the Hazzan will chant a verse for us:

*(Go, go, go Joseph you know what they say/ Hang on now Joseph you'll make it some day/ Sha la la Joseph you're doing fine/ You and your dreamcoat ahead of your time).*

Ok, the best way to learn the story about Joseph, his dreams, and his Egyptian adventures is to read the story yourself in the Torah, like we did today. But the second best way - and certainly the most fun - is to watch the fabulous musical "Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor *Dreamcoat*." Dreams are all over the songs, like in that catchy song "Go go go Joseph." Here's another example:

*(I closed my eyes, drew back the curtain/ To see for certain what I thought I knew/ Far far away, someone was weeping/ But the world was sleeping/ Any dream will do).*

(Thank you to Hazzan Sandler!) That's "Any Dream Will Do." The musical contains 24 songs. Over half of them contain the word "dream" in it. That speaks to the huge impact of dreams in the Torah's account.

Three pairs of dreams propel the story forward. That they always arrive in uninterrupted pairs demonstrates their seriousness, as Joseph says in Chapter 41. First, Joseph dreams that his brothers' sheaves of grain bow low to his own. Then he dreams that the sun, moon, and 11 stars bow down to him - presumably his parents and brothers.

The second pair of dreams comes from the imprisoned royal cupbearer and royal baker. The cupbearer sees himself pressing grapes off a vine into Pharaoh's cup. While the baker dreams that birds are eating baked goods from a basket resting on his head. And the third pair of dreams comes to Pharaoh himself. First, seven skinny cows eat up seven sturdy cows. And then seven thin ears of grain swallow up seven solid ears of grain.

I want to share a pair of interesting points about these pairs of dreams. First, they all come true. In this way, they are not merely conventional dreams but actual prophecies. The JPS Commentary says that "everywhere [in the ancient world] the dream was

recognized as a means of divine communication.” Pharaoh's is easy to see, because, as Joseph interprets, years of famine quickly subsume the 7 years of plenty. The cupbearer and baker's futures also pan out exactly the way Joseph interprets them - Pharaoh forgives the cupbearer and kills the baker.

What about Joseph's dreams? Do the brothers really bow down to him? They do! In Chapter 42, the brothers leave Canaan for Egypt in order to procure food to live out the famine. They approach the second-in-command - Joseph - and ask for food. Here is verse 6: “And Joseph's brothers came and bowed low to him, with their faces to the ground.” At this point, Joseph recognizes them but they don't realize they are bowing low to their *brother*, exactly as Joseph had dreamed as a youth.

Here's a second insight into these dreams: None of them can come true without the others. In other words, all these dreams need each other in order to come to fruition. For Joseph: his brothers bow down to him in Egypt only because the *cupbearer* shared Joseph's name to *Pharaoh* when *Pharaoh* had his unsettling dreams. For the cupbearer and baker: they need *Joseph* to make sense of their dreams and *Pharaoh's* summons to fulfill them. And for Pharaoh: he is only satisfied by *Joseph*, who is recommended by the *cupbearer*. In other words, these dreams intersect. They all come true because the others come true, and without the other dreams, no single dream will come true. Sometimes a dream needs a partner in order to be realized.

Let me share a story about two other Jewish dreamers who had captivating visions about the home of Jacob and sons: the land of Israel. About 4,000 years after Joseph, toward the end of the 19th century, lived a Jewish journalist named Theodor Herzl. We know him as the leader of *political* Zionism, author of the foundational book *The Jewish State*, and convener of the first Zionist Congress. He believed that the Jews needed a state of their own in the deepest way. In order to survive European antisemitism, the Jews needed a land with borders, a government, a flag, a place at the table of world nations. Herzl knew very little about Jewish texts and culture, nor did he care very much about the Jewish content of such a state. As Herzl said: “Zionism demands a publicly recognized and legally secured homeland in Palestine for the Jewish people...The Jews who wish for a state will have it. We shall live at last as free people on our own soil and die peacefully in our own homes.”

Herzl butted heads with another early Zionist visionary named Asher Ginzberg - better known as Ahad Ha'am. Ahad Ha'am, deeply learned in Jewish texts, disagreed on both counts. He believed that statehood would tarnish the Jews. They shouldn't concern themselves with politics, taxes, police, and the other requisite tasks of nations. That

would distract them from the key objective: building a Jewish culture. Ahad Ha'am championed *cultural* Zionism. The goal should be to create in Israel a Jewish spiritual center. This home would give birth to a Jewish cultural renaissance through art, literature, music, and more that would also invigorate Jewish communities in the diaspora. In his words, he sought "to establish a State which will be a Jewish State, and not merely a State of Jews...[For] it is not only the Jews who have come out of the ghetto; Judaism has come out, too."

Two different men, two radically different visions of what the land of Israel should become. In the end, both Herzl and Ahad Ha'am's dreams were realized. Israel is, of course, an international state, as well as the center of Jewish cultural renaissance. As Daniel Gordis notes, neither vision could come true without the other. "Without Herzl's state, Ahad Ha'am's oasis would never survive. And without Ahad Ha'am's cultural rebirth, Herzl's state would have little substance or purpose. Bitterly at odds during their lifetime, they both got their dreams realized in the Jewish State." These dreams intersected too.

Want to see what that looks like today? (Show picture)

This is a picture of the intersection of Herzl and Ahad Ha'am Streets in Tel Aviv. Israeli cities tend to group street names by categories, so it's no surprise that these two Zionist founding fathers both have streets in their names. But it is very telling to see this street intersection as a metaphor for their visions, how these dreams cross paths. Because they did. Gordis writes, "At that little intersection in Tel Aviv, the two interlocutors are locked in figurative eternal embrace in a country the grandeur of which neither could have foreseen."

Even today, one dreamer sometimes needs another in order to reach their Promised Land. The tech giant Apple Incorporated was co-founded by Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak. Woz was a wiz at the technical side of building a computer and analytics but had no skill in marketing. He never even considered selling his creation. Meanwhile, Jobs was a master business visionary but lacked the tech chops to go it alone. Then they teamed up. Woz explained in an interview: "I was just doing something I was very good at. Steve [Jobs] was much more further-thinking. When I designed good things, sometimes he'd say, 'We can sell this.' And we did." Here too, one dreamer needed the other in order for their vision to become real. We've all heard the advice, "Follow your dreams." Perhaps this needs an addendum: "Follow your dreams by finding another dreamer."

This is another reason that the Joseph musical resonates with us still, in addition to the music. The story is all about dreams: Joseph's, the cupbearer's, the baker's, and Pharaoh's. We all have dreams too. They may not be prophecies like in Genesis, but ours may seek to change the world around us, like Herzl and Ahad Ha'am. At the very least, our dreams spur us to change our own lives. Dreams still move us to reach for the stars...like in Joseph's dream.

Shabbat Shalom!