

What I Learn About Life from the Story of Joseph

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Abstract: *All of us have dreams. Like Joseph, we must never stop dreaming, never give up on our dreams. Im tirtzu ein zo aggadah - "If we will it, it is no dream." And perhaps this is the most inspiring teaching of all to be derived from Joseph and his brothers. All of Joseph's dreams came true. So can ours.*

The Torah reading for this Shabbat is *parashat miketz*. This parashah continues the famous narrative of Joseph and his brothers.

The story of Joseph and his brothers is often described as a story about sibling rivalry and parental favoritism. No reading of literature could be more superficial or more simplistic. Joseph and his brothers is an epic tale about never-ending love, forgiveness, and the willingness to change oneself for the better. We know this Bible story, you and I; we didn't just learn it as children in religious school. We know this story because we have lived it: we know how it feels to hurt and be hurt by the ones we love the most. We know how it feels to have borne the brunt of being the unfavored child, or worse, the favored one. The story of Joseph and his brothers is not unknown to us. It is the story of the lives we live.

At the beginning of our story, Joseph is a very self-centered young man who dreams egotistical dreams about his future. He is oblivious to the feelings of his brothers or his father. And even though God is with Joseph and helps him to succeed, he is completely unaware of God's presence in his life. Joseph is a secular Jew. However, as a result of several personal adversities, Joseph becomes a totally different person. Once so self-absorbed, Joseph grows up to become a highly altruistic man who devotes his life to saving the lives of others. Once focused on only his own grandiose dreams, Joseph becomes a skilled interpreter of other people's dreams. Once a secular Jew, now Joseph speaks of God's role in human history and in his own life.

From the story of Joseph and his brothers we can learn many life lessons. The first one is that if we want to have better relationships with those we love, the story of Joseph and his brothers teaches us we must be willing to work on ourselves, to change ourselves for the better, as Joseph and even his brothers did.

At the beginning of our story, Joseph's brothers treat him harshly, throw him into a pit, sell him into slavery. And when the tables are turned, when Joseph has become the second most powerful man in all the world, and his brothers appear before him pleading for food, Joseph struggles with his anger and desire for payback. At first, his desire for revenge wins out. Joseph treats his brothers harshly, he throws them into jail, he

imprisons them. But by the end of our story, Joseph forgives his brothers. Joseph embraces them, weeps over them, and even calls them “brothers.”

The story of Joseph teaches us an incredible lesson about forgiveness. It is important to forgive even when you have every legitimate right to be angry. It is important to forgive even when it’s hard. The story of Joseph teaches us there can be no peace without forgiveness. Just like the Palestinians and the Israelis, the Tutsis and the Hutus, the Irish Catholics and the Irish Protestants, the Indians and the Pakistanis, the Muslims and the Hindus, we need also to choose within our own personal lives the path of reconciliation over clinging to hurt, the path of peace over the desire that someone must pay. Created as we are by a forgiving God in the image of God, God wants us to be forgiving-minded people, people with an open and generous heart.

Finally, I would like to share with you one more important message from this incredibly powerful and inspiring story. Joseph was a dreamer. He was a dreamer in the best sense. He was a visionary. He saw what others could not see. He saw a world in which God loves and cares. He envisioned a better world, a world with food for everyone.

All of us have dreams. Like Joseph, we must never stop dreaming, never give up on our dreams. *Im tirtzu ein zo aggadah* - “if you will it, it is no dream.”

During these three remaining nights of Chanukkah, I encourage you to gaze into the light and the warm glow of the Chanukkah menorah—and dream. Dream new dreams for your children, dreams about your future, dreams for the world. Dream dreams that fill you with love, with laughter, with joy, and with light.

And perhaps this is the most inspiring teaching of all to be derived from Joseph and his brothers. All of Joseph’s dreams came true.

So can ours.