



Shabbat Table Talk Page

Overview

- **Parashah: Miketz (מִקֶּץ, "at the end of")**
- **Chapters: Genesis 41:1–44:17**



בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו, וְצִוָּנוּ לְעִסּוֹק בְּדִבְרֵי תוֹרָה

– Torah Study Blessing –

Synopsis

Last week's Torah portion (i.e., Vayeshev) related how Joseph, the favored son of Israel, was cruelly sold into slavery by his jealous brothers for 20 pieces of silver. However, the LORD was with him, and soon he was promoted to be the supervisor of his master's household! When Joseph steadfastly turned away from the seduction of his master's wife, however, he was unjustly thrown into prison, though Potiphar soon promoted him to help manage the jail. After successfully interpreting the dream of Pharaoh's imprisoned wine steward, Joseph hoped to be released from his unjust imprisonment, but the steward forgot to make appeal for him before the Pharaoh.

Two years after the wine steward was freed from prison, Pharaoh had two unusual dreams (in one, seven lean cows devoured seven well-fed cows, yet remained lean; in the other, seven thin ears of grain swallowed seven full ears, yet remained thin). Pharaoh was disturbed and called for his magicians and wise men to explain their significance, but none of them could do so. Then the wine steward remembered how Joseph had correctly interpreted his dream two years ago and promptly told Pharaoh, who hastily summoned Joseph to appear before him. Joseph had been in prison for 12 years, but the time had finally arrived for him to fulfill the dreams given to him as a young man.

When Joseph was told Pharaoh's two dreams, he explained that Egypt would experience seven prosperous years, followed by seven years of famine (the repetition of the dreams meant that the matter was certain and the seven years were imminent). Joseph further recommended that a wise person be appointed to administer the land and store food for the coming years of trouble.

Pharaoh was greatly impressed with Joseph's abilities and immediately appointed him as viceroy to oversee the entire project. He conferred upon him the royal signet ring, adorned him in fine garments, and placed him on the viceroy's chariot. He also gave Joseph an Egyptian name (Tsafnat Pane'ach - "Decipherer of Secrets") and the daughter of an Egyptian priest named Asenath as his wife. Overnight Joseph was taken from the dungeon, exalted to the right hand of Pharaoh, and given a Gentile bride. He was 30 years old at the time of his rise to power.

During the next seven years, Joseph amassed an abundance of food in the store houses across Egypt. However, just as he foretold, the seven years of famine began. Joseph then opened the storehouses and sold food supplies to the Egyptians. The neighboring regions also suffered from the worldwide famine, and their inhabitants came to Egypt to purchase food.



Because of the famine, Jacob sent all of his sons (except Benjamin, the sole survivor of his beloved wife Rachel) down to Egypt to buy food. Since Joseph was the governor of the land in charge of the food distribution, Jacob's sons came and bowed themselves before him "with their faces to the ground." Joseph immediately recognized them (but not vice versa), and accused them of being "spies." The brothers denied the charge, explaining their family background, and insisted that they were in Egypt merely to buy food. Joseph then ordered them to bring back their brother Benjamin in order to "prove" their story, and after imprisoning them for three days, released 9 of the 10 brothers (holding Simeon "hostage") until they would later return with Benjamin. The brothers then remembered their treatment of Joseph and attributed their current troubles to their abuse of him. Unknown to them (since they were unaware that he understood their native tongue of Hebrew), Joseph understood their display of *teshuvah*, walked away and quietly wept.

Before the brothers departed back to the land of Canaan, Joseph secretly instructed his servants to return their money inside their sacks of grain. On the way back home, the brothers discovered the money and feared that they would be accused of stealing the grain. When they arrived home, they told the entire ordeal to Jacob, who (despite Simeon's hostage status) flatly refused to let Benjamin make the return trip to Egypt with them.

However, after their supply of grain finally ran out, Reuben appealed to Jacob to bear responsibility for Benjamin, though he was rebuffed (doubtlessly because of his previous incestuous union with Bilhah, Rachel's handmaiden and the mother of Dan and Naphtali). When the conditions became insufferable, however, Judah approached his father and swore to take personal and eternal responsibility for the welfare of Benjamin. Upon hearing Judah's promise, Jacob finally relented and allowed him to go with the other brothers back to Egypt.

When they finally returned to Egypt, the brothers were officially escorted to Joseph's house by Egyptian guards, where they presented a gift from their father and again bowed down before him. Joseph then hosted a feast and had the brothers sit in the order of their birth - much to their amazement. He also served Benjamin five times the food of the other brothers!

The morning after the feast, as the brothers were getting ready to return to Canaan, Joseph devised a final test for his brothers by ordering his servants to once again fill their sacks with their money - but to carefully hide Joseph's silver "divination" goblet in Benjamin's sack. After the brothers left for home, they were soon overtaken and confronted by Joseph's steward and his guards, who (following Joseph's script) accused them of stealing the goblet. They (again) protested their innocence and agreed to be searched, but the goblet was found in Benjamin's sack. The brothers then tore their clothes in grief and returned to make appeal to Joseph, where they once again fell to the ground before him and confessed their guilt before God (thus indicating true *teshuvah*). The portion ends as Judah offered himself and his brothers to be slaves in place of Benjamin, but Joseph refused and insisted that only Benjamin would be made a slave for the "crime."





Parashah Questions



1. What does *miketz* (מִקֶּטֶץ) mean? (Gen. 41:1) ¹
2. Why did Joseph have to stay two more years in prison? ²
3. What was Pharaoh's first dream? (41:1-4) ³
4. What was Pharaoh's second dream? (41:5-7) ⁴
5. Who were the magicians of Egypt? ⁵
6. Could the magicians interpret Pharaoh's dreams? ⁶
7. When did the chief wine steward remember his promise to Joseph? (41:9-13) ⁷
8. According to Jewish tradition, when was Joseph released from the dungeon to appear before the king of Egypt? ⁸
9. What did Joseph say to Pharaoh about the power to interpret dreams? (41:15-16) ⁹
10. How did Pharaoh test Joseph's claim? ¹⁰

¹ The word *miketz* means "from" (מִן) and "the end" (קֶץ), which can be translated as "from the end" or "at the end of," referring contextually to the two years after which Joseph interpreted the dreams of the chief baker and wine steward, but referring prophetically to *acharit hayamim*, the "end of days," when Yeshua will be revealed to the Jewish people during times of tribulation and testing called *chevelei Mashiach* (חֲבָלֵי הַמָּשִׁיחַ) - the "birth pangs of the Messiah."

² Joseph had to stay another two years because the wine steward "forgot" about him and therefore failed to bring up his case before Pharaoh. According to midrash, because Joseph had *twice* appealed to the steward to speak to Pharaoh on his behalf, he was punished for trusting in man rather than God, one extra year per request. According to another interpretation, the Torah refers to the extra time as "two years of days" to suggest that Joseph suffered willingly and therefore the time seems as if it were a few days.

³ Pharaoh dreamed he saw seven plump and attractive cows come up out of the Nile River to feed in the reed grasses, but then seven skinny cows came out of the Nile and devoured them.

⁴ Pharaoh saw seven thin heads of grain of growing up over seven healthy heads, as if they swallowed them up.

⁵ These were necromancers who practiced using inscriptions and enchantments to predict the future. The Hebrew word *chartot* (חֲרָטוֹת) refers to scribes of some kind, or engravers of incantations.

⁶ No, they stood there dumbfounded. Some say that the Pharaoh tested them to see if they could tell him *both* the dream and its interpretation, similar to Nebuchadnezzar's test of the magicians, astrologers, sorcerers, and the wise men of the Chaldeans.

⁷ Because the magicians failed the test, Pharaoh sentenced them to death, and this "jarred" the memory of the wine steward regarding his own experience in prison when Joseph successfully interpreted his dream.

⁸ Joseph left on Rosh Hashanah, 2230 (Sept. 24, 1552 BC). The seven year cycles would begin later in Nisan – *after* the birth of Joseph's sons (41:50).

⁹ Joseph gave glory to God by saying dream interpretation was a gift from heaven, not a result of his own wisdom. The "Jewish heart," circumcised by the Spirit, creates "one who is praised by God- not by men" (Rom. 2:29)

¹⁰ Pharaoh changed the description of his dream, and Joseph corrected him, "No, that is not what you dreamed."



11. How did Joseph interpret these dreams? (41:26-32) ¹¹
12. In light of Pharaoh's dreams, what did Joseph recommend? (41:33-36) ¹²
13. Why did God decree the seven years of famine upon Egypt? ¹³
14. Why was the king so impressed with Joseph that he regarded him as the wisest of all men and decided to immediately appoint him as overseer of all Egypt? (41:39-40) ¹⁴
15. How did Pharaoh honor Joseph? (41:41-42) ¹⁵
16. What was so unusual about the way Pharaoh honored Joseph by having him ride in the royal chariot? (41:43) ¹⁶
17. What new name did Pharaoh give Joseph? (41:45) ¹⁷
18. How old was Joseph when he ascended to power? (41:46) ¹⁸

¹¹ There is a difficulty here. Pharaoh first saw the fat cows and then the skinny ones, but Joseph first spoke of the seven lean years (41:27) and then he spoke of the seven years of plenty (41:29). Why did he reverse the order? At any rate, Joseph said the dreams meant the same thing: There would be seven good years with plenty of food, followed by seven bad years with so little food that the seven good years would be forgotten.

¹² He recommended that Pharaoh select a "discerning and wise man" to be set over the land of Egypt to supervise overseers to collect 1/5th of the harvests of the land during the seven plentiful years. These would be kept in storage under the authority of Pharaoh for food in the seven years of famine.

¹³ God promised Abraham that Israel would be enslaved in Egypt, but afterward they would leave with great wealth. When Joseph arrived in Egypt, however, it was a very poor country and therefore God decreed that a worldwide famine would arise so that Egypt would acquire the wealth of the nations by selling its stored grains. Of course, Joseph was responsible for Egypt's wealth – and well as for the survival of the Egyptians – and during the Exodus, the debt owed from Egypt was "collected" by God.

¹⁴ After Joseph interpreted the dreams, the midrash has Pharaoh questioning Joseph: "How do I know you are telling the truth?" Joseph replied, "I will give you a sign: at this moment, your wife is going into labor and will give birth to your firstborn. The child will be a boy, but shortly after he is born, he will die." As soon as he finished saying this, a messenger came to Pharaoh and privately told him this very thing had happened... Pharaoh soon became in awe over Joseph's power of prophecy and put him in charge of the entire country. We may suppose that Joseph's ascension was a miracle – a sort of "resurrection" to the right hand of the power of high here, since the king essentially gave him dictatorial authority over all the world.

¹⁵ Pharaoh gave him his royal signet ring and dressed him with the finest garments of Egypt. Then he placed a gold chain around his neck, thereby investing him with full authority as the viceroy of Egypt. This pictures, of course, the elevation of the son of God after his time of suffering.

¹⁶ The second chariot (i.e., merkavah) usually rode alongside Pharaoh himself. The royal criers walked in front of Joseph saying, *avrekh!* (אַבְרֵךְ), meaning "bow the knee!" (from the root *berekh*, knee). In other words, every knee would bow before Joseph in his elevation to the right hand of the power on high... (Phil. 2:10; Rom. 14:11).

¹⁷ The name Tzafnat Pane'ach (צַפְנַת פָּנֵי־אֵחַ) is thought to mean "Revealer of Secrets" (from *tzafun*, "hidden" (as the Afikomen step in the Seder) and *yafna nach*, "easily reveals"). See Rev. 19:12 regarding the Name of Yeshua.

¹⁸ He was thirty years old.



19. Who was Asenath?¹⁹
20. Who were the two sons of Joseph and Asenath? (41:50-52)²⁰
21. Why did Joseph want to forget his father's house?²¹
22. Why did Jacob send his sons to Egypt? (42:1-4)²²
23. Why did Jacob refuse to send Benjamin with the other brothers?²³
24. How did Joseph treat his brothers after they came to Egypt to get food?²⁴
25. How did Joseph demand the brothers to verify their story? (42:13)²⁵
26. Who was the brother than remained in custody? (42:24)²⁶
27. Who was the “interpreter” of Hebrew for Joseph? (42:23)²⁷



- ¹⁹ Asenath was the daughter of a priest of On (Poti Phera) who was appointed to be Joseph's wife by Pharaoh. Jewish tradition claims Asenath was the daughter of Dinah who was later adopted by Potiphar (who had become a monk after he threw Joseph into the prison and divorced his wife). All this to preserve Jewish ethnocentrism!
- ²⁰ Joseph's sons were named *Manasseh* [מְנַשֶּׁה], “causing to forget” – “God *has made me forget* (נִשְׁכַּחְתִּי) all my hardship and all my father's house”; and *Ephraim* [אֶפְרַיִם], “fruitful” - God *has made me fruitful* (הִפְרִינִי, fr. פִּרְיָה) in the land of my misfortune. These two were born *before* the famine began (41:50). After he was reunited with Joseph in Egypt, Jacob adopted Ephraim and Manasseh as full sons of Israel.
- ²¹ Perhaps because of his earlier betrayal, and yet there is a question as to why he didn't “phone home” to at least let his grieving father know that he was still alive... Or did Joseph blame his father for his brother's betrayal?
- ²² The famine had devastated the land of Canaan and the family needed food, of course. But what is interesting is that Jacob sent all the brothers at once (except for Benjamin), instead of his servants or one brother at a time. Why did Jacob do this? Did he have a prophetic glimmering of the future here? After all, surely Jacob recalled Abraham's vision of the 400 year bondage in Egypt to come... The sages say that as dictator of Egypt, Joseph made special regulations to keep people from hoarding the grains (or wholesaling and reselling them). First, no slave could purchase food (rules out the brothers' servants); second, only one donkey per householder was permitted to carry food (explains why all ten brothers were sent); and third, before anyone could buy grain, he must register – giving his name, name of his father, and other family information (this explains the interrogation of the brothers later). Joseph did all this by design, because he foresaw the brothers would come, though he was unsure how he would “catch them in his net,” since he set up several food distribution centers in Egypt.
- ²³ He was afraid of what might happen to him – indicating that the wound over the loss of Joseph was still fresh in his mind and heart.
- ²⁴ Joseph recognized his brothers, but they did not recognize him... He spoke roughly to them: “Where do you come from?” Joseph treated them as strangers, accused them of being spies (mergalim). According to midrash, Joseph gazed into his divining cup and pretended to go into a trance “Through my spell, I see that you are spies, that you once destroyed the great city of Shechem, and that you also once sold your own brother as a slave...”
- ²⁵ He arrested them and ordered that one of them should be sent back to Canaan to fetch Benjamin and bring him back to corroborate the story. He then put them in prison for three days, afterwards, he softened his approach and said that only one of the brothers would be imprisoned and the other nine could go – so that food could be brought their starving households, if they were indeed speaking the truth.
- ²⁶ Simeon was chosen because he was the one who threw Joseph into the pit (Rashi). “He took Simeon from them and bound him before their eyes.”
- ²⁷ Joseph's son Manasseh was the interpreter as well as the steward who put the money back in the sacks.



28. Who was the brother who discovered the money was in his sack? (42:27) ²⁸
29. After the brothers returned to Canaan and explained their predicament to their Jacob their father, what did he say? (42:29-36) ²⁹
30. Who first tried to convince Jacob to let Benjamin return to Egypt? (42:37-38) ³⁰
31. Who later succeeded in persuading Jacob to let Benjamin return? (43:1-10) ³¹
32. Why did Jacob appeal to El Shaddai to show pity on the family? (43:14) ³²
33. When the brothers returned to Egypt with Benjamin, what did Joseph do? ³³
34. What did Joseph instruct his steward (Manasseh) to do before the brothers returned to Canaan? (44:4-5) ³⁴
35. What did the brothers say after they were arrested by the steward? (44:9) ³⁵
36. Who interceded on behalf of the brothers to Joseph? (44:16) ³⁶

Discussion Topics:

1. Miketz means “at the end of” and is therefore thought to prefigure the End of Days (*acharit ha-yamim*). How does Joseph picture Yeshua during the prophesied End of Days?

²⁸ According to Rashi, citing midrash, it was Levi, who was a regular accomplice to Simeon.

²⁹ Jacob told them they were making his childless (שְׁכִינִי)... No more Joseph, no more Simeon, and now they would take Benjamin, the sole survivor of his relationship with Rachel. Jacob regarded himself as “childless” because of the prophecy that he would have 12 sons. This explains why the loss of Joseph was an ongoing source of trauma for him, too, since it suggested that God’s plan had failed and that he had somehow lost the blessing....

³⁰ Reuben offered to exchange two of his four sons in exchange for the loss of Benjamin (46:9) – one for Benjamin and the other for Simeon. Jacob, however, ignored him, probably because of the dishonor Reuben showed him earlier when he violated his marriage with Bilhah.

³¹ Judah offered to bear the blame forever if any harm came to Benjamin. His pledge was enough for Jacob.

³² El Shaddai (אֱלֹהֵי שֹׁדַי) referred to God as the sustainer of the family, the One who nurtured the family and promised Abraham and Isaac a multitude of descendants. Some of the sages say that Shaddai comes from *dai*, meaning “enough!” (dayenu). “May He who said “enough” to the world say “enough” to my troubles.”

³³ Joseph served them a feast and pretended to use his divination cup to place them in the order of their birth. He also gave Benjamin a portion five times greater than the others!

³⁴ He instructed him to “set up” Benjamin as a thief by placing his divination goblet in his sack.

³⁵ They stated that whoever took the goblet would be killed and the others made slaves.

³⁶ Judah offered that all the brothers would become slaves to Joseph, though Joseph stated that only Benjamin would become his slave, since he was the one who “took” the divination cup.



2. How is Joseph a picture of Yeshua the Messiah?

- He was a shepherd, deeply beloved and anointed by his father, who sent on a mission to seek the welfare of his brothers. He was a dreamer and a “decipherer of secrets,” who was hated by his brothers, who refused to believe in him, conspired to kill him, stripped him of his robe, threw him into a pit, and betrayed him for a few pieces of silver... He was raised from the pit, however, filled with the Spirit of God, and made overseer of all of the world. He ascended from a place of death to the “right hand of the majesty on high,” crowned with glory and honor, before whom “every knee would bow.” He was given a Gentile bride and became the “bread of life” and savior to the entire world. He later revealed his true identity to his brothers during a time of great tribulation and was regarded as alive from the dead by his father, who regarded him as the redeemer of Israel.

Just as Joseph was finally revealed to the Jewish people as a Messiah and Savior (though they had initially betrayed him and rejected him), so will the Jewish people come to see that Jesus (Yeshua) is the promised Jewish Mashiach and the Savior of the world. Meanwhile, “Jesus” remains a “disguised Egyptian...”

3. Joseph was 17 when he was sold into slavery; he was with Potiphar for 1 year; he was in prison for 12 years, and he was 30 when he was made governor of Egypt. If he had been away from his father for 22 years total, then that leaves 9 years when he was governor of Egypt before he was reunited with his father. How could Joseph have allowed his father to mourn him for so long? Why didn't Joseph “phone home” after he was released from prison in Egypt?

- Nachmanides states that Joseph regarded his dreams as *prophecies*. In his first dream, his eleven brothers were bowing down to him; in the second, his father was included too. Joseph concluded that the first dream must be realized in its entirety before the second one would be fulfilled. Had he sent a message to Jacob, he certainly would have come to see him immediately - and the second dream would have come true before the first. He therefore waited until after all eleven of his brothers had come to him before revealing his identity to his brothers (and to his father).
- Some scholars say that Joseph was concerned that God would punish his brothers for selling him. He therefore wanted to ensure that they *repented*. By definition, repentance (*teshuvah*) is demonstrated when the transgressor finds himself in the same situation as when he was tempted to sin in the first place, but this time chooses not to sin. When Joseph saw that their repentance was complete he revealed himself and told the brothers to let Jacob know that he was still alive. Had Joseph let his father know earlier that he was still alive, his brothers would never have had the opportunity to undergo teshuvah.

For Next Week:

- Read Parashat **Vayigash** (i.e., Genesis 44:18-47:27)