

Dream On

This week's parsha, *Miketz*, is the height of drama in the entire book of Genesis. The last two weeks we've seen the family moving on parallel tracks and now the course brings the family into collision. Famine drives the brothers from Canaan to Egypt in search of food. As viceroy, Joseph oversees Egypt's abundant food stores and allocations. The brothers come before Joseph to ask for food and bow to him. And in that moment, Joseph remembers his dreams from years earlier, foretelling of his brothers prostration before Joseph. (Gen 42:9)

The odd part of his recognition is Joseph's reaction: Joseph remembers and then accuses the brothers of being spies. If the brothers' appearance and action represent the realization of Joseph's dreams, which is Rashi's reading of this verse, why does he say nothing of his true identity? This would have been the time to reveal his true self. Instead, Joseph keeps it a secret. (See Rashi, *ibid*)

Ramban does not share this reading of the text with Rashi. He argues, to the contrary, that the dream was not yet realized. After all, 11 stars bow to Joseph in his second dream. Now, however, only 10 brothers were bowing to Joseph. [Jacob refused to send Benjamin, preferring to keep his sole, remaining son from his wife Rachel nearest to him.] Joseph, then, concocted a scheme that would ensnare the brothers and force them to bring Benjamin to Egypt as well. (See Ramban, *ibid*)

Ramban writes quite forcefully when considering Rashi's reading. To paraphrase, if Joseph indeed believed that he was witnessing the fulfillment of his dream, why would he not say so then and there? To withhold his identity would have been terribly cruel to his father and family.

[In truth, we must wonder how Rashi would assess Joseph's character. Would Rashi condone Joseph's reluctance to reveal his identity? What noble purpose does Joseph's secret identity serve?]

For Ramban, the approach is clear: Joseph has not seen his dream realized; he must set the stage to enable its fulfillment. Rashi, on the other hand, separates dreams from reality. Joseph saw his dream come true, but what next? That much is not clear from the dream. In his heart, Joseph's next step must've been uncertain: Is he meant to continue as a viceroy, go back to Canaan or exact revenge?

Rashi and Ramban teach us two important messages about our dreams. For Ramban, dreams must be nurtured. The dream is a message from God on high and we must see it to its fruition. Sometimes, we may even act in questionable ways to see it come true. Rashi's reading of the Joseph story teaches us what we do with our dreams. Here, the

critical point is the intersection of vision and action; this is the defining event of our lives. Our dreams bring us to the moment, but then we are called upon to animate the vision.

Chanukkah is a holiday that celebrates the refusal to bow to external pressure. Greece's influence in the ancient world was unmatched. The defiant Jewish spirit, clinging to its dream, even against terrifying forces, continues to inspire us today. And the rebels' decision to fight on Shabbat to protect their own lives was a questionable decision, possibly at odds with Jewish values. But when the dream is realized and a victory is won for Jewish identity – what do we do with one day's worth of oil? In those moments, Jewish destiny unfolds.

Shabbat Shalom Umevorach and Chanukkah Sameach
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