



MIKETZ – KEDEM CHANUKAH 2020 BY CARYN GRANEK

The painful past casts a long shadow on this week's parsha Miketz. A father's insensitive treatment of his sons — and the resulting sibling rivalry — form the backdrop to this tale.

Jacob's relationship to his sons' mothers underlies his attitude toward their children. Among his wives, Jacob loves Rachel only, paying scant attention to Leah and the sisters' maidservants. Likewise, Jacob dearly favors Joseph — Rachel's firstborn — showing little evidence of affection toward his other children. Blind to the difficult family dynamic he engenders, in previous verses Jacob had sent Joseph alone to check on his brother - a situation rife with the potential for the disaster which then unfolds.

Joseph's disappearance into slavery in Egypt gives us one of the greatest transformations in all literature. We read how Joseph moves from prisoner to prime minister. How did this occur?

Joseph was granted three gifts that were an awesome combination. The first was that he dreamed dreams. The second was that he could interpret the dreams of others. He did so for the butler and baker in prison and, in this week's parsha, for Pharaoh.

Joseph's most impressive achievement, though, was his third gift, the ability to implement dreams, solving the problem of which they were an early warning. No sooner had he told of a seven-year famine than he continued, without pause, to provide a solution: to place a wise man in charge of the land and set aside part of the harvest to store for the seven years of famine.

From Joseph, therefore, we learn three principles. The first is: dream dreams. Never be afraid to let your imagination soar. Take the time, the space and the imagination to dream. In dreams we discover our passion, and following our passion is the best way to live a rewarding life.

Theodor Herzl, to whom more than any other person we owe the existence of the state of Israel, used to say, "If you will it, it is no dream." Eli Wiesel tells the story of a time when Sigmund Freud and Theodore Herzl lived in the same district of Vienna. "Fortunately," he said, "they never met. Can you imagine what would have happened had they met?"

Theodore Herzl would have said: I have a dream of a Jewish state. Freud would have replied: Tell me, Herr Herzl, how long have you been having this dream? Lie down on my couch, and I will psychoanalyze you. Herzl would have been cured of his dreams and today there would be no Jewish state." Fortunately, the Jewish people have never been cured of their dreams.

The second principle is that good leaders interpret other people's dreams. They find a way of articulating and expressing the hopes and fears of a generation. Martin Luther King's "I have a dream" speech was about taking the hopes of African Americans and giving them wings. It was not Joseph's dreams that made him a leader: it was Pharaoh's. Our own dreams give us direction; it is other people's dreams that give us opportunity.

The third principle is: find a way to implement dreams. First see the problem, then find a way of solving it. Good leaders either are, or surround themselves with, problem-solvers. It is easy to see what is going wrong. What makes a leader is the ability to find a way of putting it right. Joseph's genius lay not in predicting seven years of plenty followed by seven years of famine, but in devising a system of storage that would ensure food supplies in the lean and hungry years.

It is with great relief that we count the days towards the end of this year – 2020. Two. Zero. Two. Zero. Author Trent Dalton describes these as “a cold set of numbers. Four of the darkest digits humankind may ever assemble. Twenty Twenty. A cold year.” This was a year of cold numbers, measurements, distances and the radius of a virus. There was fear and doubt and wide spaces dividing our global village by oceans no longer crossed.

Spaces opened between cities, between parents and children and between precious friends. The unforgiving virus howled at our best laid plans and rendered every squabble and disagreement ridiculous. Financial security was stolen, travellers stopped in their tracks. Supermarket shelves emptied, front doors locked and finally we all came to rest. Priorities shifted to what really mattered – those people we love and value in our lives. And we dreamed of a day that we would be together again.

In our own Kedem community we took stock. We found a way to connect called Zoom and tapped into that annoying little box marked Unmute. And unmute we did. We shared our stories and found new ways of celebrating – first Pesach. We were hardly in the mood as we were reminded of the plagues that beset Egypt and our seder tables shrunk to one, two or four people.

Maybe Eliyahu would not come this year but we opened the door anyway just in case – and we dreamed that he would come with a vision of a better tomorrow. We zoomed Shavuot and soon it was Rosh Hashanah and then Yom Kippur and still we zoomed.

We wondered how many would live and how many would die – who by fire – and who should we say is calling?

Chanukah has just concluded and took place in the context of a pandemic that still covers the globe bringing misery, insecurity and isolation to many. Over 1.65 million people around the world have died, and over 74 million people have contracted Covid 19 to date in over 218 countries. In Australia we have lost 908 people to the virus and endured over 28,000 cases.

The worst public health crisis in 100 years this virus has wrapped us in a shroud of darkness that only now, with the prospect of new vaccines on the way, appears to be giving way to new light and hope.

Chanukah was the first festival since Purim that families could come together to light the lights and tell the stories, sing the songs and show our love for one another face to face. The broader message however is that somehow our spirit survived even this shattering experience. This is a Jewish story. We have survived defeats, expulsions, persecutions and pogroms and yet we never stopped dreaming. This year we did not stop dreaming that we would be free of fear, free of masks and free to go about our lives again.

When the story of this tragic period in the history of the 21st century is written, it will not just reveal the grim statistics or record the exhilarating advances in science, but recall the remarkable spirit and character of those who worked and generously contributed their resources; fed those in need; adapted their lives to provide cheer and comfort to our elderly, instruction to our schoolchildren, healing to the ill and connection to those left alone.

The solace of solitude is about to end. The rabbit hole of lockdown is over and we begin to dig our way out to the surface again. Today's parsha teaches us to follow in Joseph's path. To dream dreams; understand and articulate the dreams of others; and find ways of turning a dream into a reality.

This is the perfect time to reflect and dream. What do I want to keep from the year that has passed and what do I want to throw away?

Personally I want to embrace the Joy of Missing Out.

When the world begins to shout and rush towards that shining thing
 I want to rush along towards the latest bit of mental bling.
 Trying to have it, do it, see it – I've decided not to go through it.
 The anxious clamouring and need, the restless hunger still to feed.
 Instead to feel the loveliness of emptiness and favour my peaceful self
 Without regret, without a doubt
 I want to experience the joy of missing out.

Ken Yehi Razon