

## פרשת מקץ

### OVERVIEW

Pharaoh also had a dream in the night. He summons a sage to interpret it for him. At that moment, two years after his release from prison, the faithless butler remembers his promise to the young Joseph and without delay he is brought before the king. Joseph solves the puzzle in a masterful way and is soon appointed to the highest public office in the land. True to his interpretation of Pharaoh's dream, seven years of plenty is followed by a period of terrible famine. Thanks to Joseph's precautionary measures Egypt has enough resources to enable her to supply even neighboring countries with foodstuffs.

Thus it came to pass that Yaakov sends his sons to Egypt to obtain provisions. The brothers are brought before Joseph on a charge of spying. They do not recognize him. As a proof of their innocence he demands that they bring their youngest brother Binyamin whom Yaakov had kept at home. Shimon is retained as a hostage. The brothers are on their way home when they are stopped on orders of Joseph and forced to turn back.

### COMMENTARY

#### Joseph's Release

Two years pass and suddenly, unexpectedly, Joseph is freed from prison. He soon advances to the highest office in the land. He adjusts as quickly to life in the royal palace as he did to Potiphar's gardens. He is equally adept at dealing with Pharaoh. He easily penetrates the mystery of the dream's seven cows and seven ears of corn. The king is even more impressed by Joseph's political genius in ordering measures designed to cope with the urgent problem of a threatening famine. We can visualize a lecture on organized free enterprise delivered before an astonished court. He advises to withhold a fifth of the annual harvest during the seven years of plenty in order to distribute the wheat during the years of famine. No more export during the emergency period, declared Joseph. There will

be but one buyer and that is the state. Another measure revealing his grasp of mass psychology is the arrangement for the provisions stored by the state to be assembled in towns that are centers of production. This would enable the Egyptians to see the merchandise and stifle rumors of black market dealings. Little wonder that Joseph's economic policies met with the enthusiastic approval of the population.

#### "Joseph the provider"

The flawless execution of Joseph's plan makes him the most popular and admired salesman in Egypt. There are numerous examples of his wise guidance during this critical period. No wholesale trade was permitted. This move eliminated speculation and a forced rise in prices. The merchandise was distributed directly to the consumers who had to submit their requirements in person. (Thus we understand why all sons of Yaakov had to come to obtain provisions instead of sending one or two brothers). When cash resources became scarce, Joseph arranged for a barter system in the form of land as payment for food. Later on, when prosperity would come back, the fields were to be returned to the former owner, albeit in the form of leasehold estates that remained the property of the state. These measures were of enormous importance in securing the supreme power of the Egyptian royal dynasties.

#### Joseph meets his brothers

The encounter is unexpected. The brothers fail to recognize in the person of the famed minister their once-hated brother whom they had sold to the Yishmaelites. Joseph, for his part, recognizes them at once, in his eyes they had not changed. The question arises why Joseph does not reveal his identity at this meeting? Why does he choose to cause them, and himself, so much added pain? It appears however that he acted wisely in order to gain time to ascertain their moral attitude. He faced two problems: 1) Would his brothers still be as insensitive to the troubles of one of them as

they had been in his own case? 2) Were they still capable of abandoning a brother in need if this interfered with their comfort? It is for these reasons that he puts them to the test.

### Binyamin

Joseph accuses the brothers of espionage for a foreign power under the pretext of having come to buy provisions. He meets their repeated denials with a single argument: the absence of the youngest brother. Surely their underground work would be extremely dangerous; it is safer to keep the brother securely at home. If their intentions were peaceful, why not bring eleven men instead of ten? Binyamin's presence would establish the brothers' loyalty.

They discuss Joseph's statement in his presence for they did not know that he understood their language. At that moment Joseph realized that a change had indeed taken place in the attitude of his brothers in that the memory of their heinous crime still burdened their conscience. This was to be the first step toward their reconciliation.

### The Meal

The brothers return to Egypt with Binyamin. They are received at once by the viceroy. He can barely control his desire to embrace his younger brother, son of his mother. The brothers are seated at the table in order of their ages – who could have told their host about that? They are confused by the contrast between the warm reception at this occasion and the hostile welcome when they first came to Egypt.

Despite his exalted position, Joseph adhered strictly to the tenets of the Jewish law (similar to Esther's conduct in Persia's royal palace). He remained loyal to the family tradition in his own way of life. There was never a desire for quick assimilation to

Egyptian ways, never an attempt to placate the ruler. Alone in a foreign land, cut off from his family, he preserves his religious integrity and loyalty to the spirit alive in his parental home.

### The silver goblet

The final test is at hand. Joseph plans to separate Binyamin from his brothers by causing his personal goblet to be hidden in Binyamin's sack and ordering his officers to forcibly return the alleged thief. Will Rachel's second son meet the same fate as the first? Will the brothers, bent on delivering the provisions to their father, abandon their youngest brother and perhaps invent a new tale of a wild animal that killed him? Or will they act as responsible guardians and rise to his defense? This is what Joseph is determined to find out.

It is not without reason that he chooses a goblet for this test, since in Egypt the goblet was the object of religious veneration (see 44:5). The brothers must have been aware of this. Their reaction could be twofold: motivated by greed they might attempt to keep this magic object in their possession at any price or they might consider the goblet merely as a valuable piece of merchandise and then it would be simply a test of their honesty. Be it as it may, this is the final opportunity for the brothers to prove that their lies and treachery were a thing of the past and that a new period had begun when nothing mattered but the family honor, the welfare of each family member and the perpetuation of the Abrahamitic spirit.

---

First publication in the French Language during WWII in Occupied France as "La Tohra Commentée" © 1945 Marc Breuer. Translated to English by R' Marc (מרדכי) and Jacob Breuer זצ"ל. Missing parts translated from the original French text by Elie Winsbacher. Edited and Published in English with permission of the author's family by Elie Winsbacher . © 2003. Based on the teachings of Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch זצ"ל. To receive electronically, please send email to: e.w@att.net or download from the website of the Central Organization for Jewish Outreach at <http://www.cojo.net>.