



The Text:

Joseph asks his fellow inmates to tell him their dreams, so he can interpret them.

“[The Torah means] to speak in praise of Joseph: he was a youth and a slave [while the baker and wine steward were] two prominent officials ...each of whom could have ordered him killed. Yet he was not afraid to ask them [about their dreams], and speak his mind concerning their interpretation, for he trusted in his wisdom - [although] if the baker had escaped [the execution predicted by Joseph], he would have hung him.”

[Ramban - comments to Genesis 40:7]

The Question:

We might have expected to read that Joseph trusted in *G-d*. Instead, we are told that he trusted his own wisdom. Why is this worthy of praise?

The Answer:

Confidence in our abilities does not negate trust in G-d. On the contrary: when we recognize that talent is a Divine gift, we can trust that G-d will help us succeed. Joseph trusted his wisdom *because* it was G-d-given; had he attributed the power to himself, he might have been too afraid to try.

The Message:

We know that *bitachon* – trust in G-d’s benevolence – grants us the serenity to deal with life’s challenges. But *bitachon* gives us something else too: the courage to act with the confidence, knowing that G-d has the power to grant us success.

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Home at last in Canaan, Jacob hopes to finally live in peace. But new troubles appear on the horizon - not from an enemy like Esau or Laban, but within Jacob's own family.

Jacob singles out Joseph, his eleventh son, for his exceptional wisdom and leadership abilities. Joseph's uniqueness is apparently confirmed by unusual dreams predicting his rise to power. But Joseph's brothers feel threatened by his special status, and attribute his dreams to delusions of grandeur.

Jacob sends Joseph to visit his brothers, who are away tending the sheep; when he arrives, the brothers convene a tribunal, and reach the verdict that Joseph must be eliminated. They decide to sell Joseph as a slave, neutralizing the threat without physically harming their brother. Joseph is transported to Egypt, while Jacob, believing him dead, descends into inconsolable mourning.

Jewish Tradition recognizes Jacob's sons as "perfectly righteous individuals"; the names of all twelve were engraved on the breastplate worn by the High Priest in the Temple.¹ The brother's drastic actions emanated from the genuine belief that Joseph was bent on their destruction, and presented a mortal danger to their existence. Although the Midrash identifies the errors that led to this tragic misunderstanding, these are understood as subtle misjudgments made by great men; no one else, in those circumstances, would have done any better. Ultimately, these events were a manifestation of the Divine Plan. On its path to nationhood, Israel had to endure a bitter Egyptian bondage; Joseph's harrowing experience, and ultimate triumph, paved the way for the survival of the Jewish People.

Joseph is bought by Potiphar, a courtier of Pharaoh, who promotes him to manager of his estate. Unfortunately, he also earns the attention of Potiphar's wife. His rejection of her advances only escalates her attempts at seduction until, catching him alone, she grabs him by his garment and demands compliance. Joseph flees, leaving his garment in her hands.

When Potiphar returns home, his wife accuses Joseph of assaulting *her*. Joseph is sent to prison, where his fellow inmates include Pharaoh's chief wine steward and chief baker. One night they are disturbed by mysterious dreams, which Joseph interprets for them: in three days, the wine steward will be rehabilitated and the baker executed.

Joseph's predictions prove correct. The wine steward regains his position; however, despite Joseph's request that he remember him to Pharaoh, the wine steward forgets Joseph and does nothing.

¹ S'forno

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