

# Torah Weekly

בס"ד

22-28 December, 2019

24-30 Kislev, 5780

Torah: Mikeitz: Genesis 41:1-

44:17; Numbers 28:9-15;

Numbers 7:42-47

Haftorah: Zachariah 2:14 -

4:7; Isaiah 66:1; Isaiah 66:23-

24; Isaiah 66:23; Samuel I

20:18; Samuel I 20:42

PARSHAT MIKEITZ

## Calendars

We have Jewish Calendars. If you would like one, please send us a letter and we will send you one, or ask the Rabbi/Chaplain to contact us.

## Family Programs

Do you have family on the outside struggling? Please contact or have them contact our office to learn more about our family programs. You and they are not alone, we are here to help.

## Grape Juice & Matzah

We offer free Grape Juice and Matzah for you to be able to make the blessings every Shabbos. Please have your chaplain / Rabbi contact us to enroll (available to all prisons).

**Joseph the Charmer** Woven throughout the story of Joseph's life are dreams and their interpretations, beginning with his dreams that his brothers would bow to him, which prompted them to sell him into slavery. Years later, his freedom and subsequent rise to power was brought about by his skillful interpretation of Pharaoh's dreams. And Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I have dreamed a dream, and there is no interpreter for it, but I have heard it said of you [that] you understand a dream, to interpret it." (Genesis 41:15) Dream interpretation turned out to be central to Joseph's story, because, according to the Kabbalists, it represents his spiritual makeup and unique Divine mission. A dream is a state of mind where there is no orderly thinking; a place where opposing forces can co-exist, and one can quickly move between opposite extremes. One moment the dreamer is in grave danger, a moment later he is safe and sound. Life is like a dream. This world we live in is one of fragmentation. In a single day we experience opposite feelings, highs and lows, the pull to transcend and the opposing gravitational pull of the earth. We experience moments of meaning and mindfulness, as well as moments of distraction, pain, and confusion. Joseph's experience, too, was dream-like. One moment he was a prisoner, an hour later he was the second-in-command leader of Egypt. If life is similar to a dream, then the key to success is to be an interpreter. The Hebrew word for (dream) interpreter is *poter* (פּוֹתֵר), (which means to solve, as in solving a riddle). The same letters rearranged spell the word *tofer* (תּוֹפֵר), which means to sew. By realizing that he must serve as the needle,

stitching the fragments together to create unity, Joseph was able to solve Pharaoh's dreams and untangle life's challenges. To Joseph every experience, both positive and negative, was part of a single tapestry. The negative moments in life, the challenges one faces, are confusing until they are sewn together to reveal the bigger picture. The ability to interpret the dream comes from infusing every moment and experience with meaning. No matter where a person is, he or she is always able to ask: What can I accomplish at this moment? Who can I help? How can I advance the cause of goodness and kindness? Which is precisely what Joseph told Pharaoh. Pharaoh saw only details. He saw fat cows and emaciated cows, plump ears of grain and withered ones. But Joseph saw more. How did he crack the code? And Joseph said to Pharaoh, "Pharaoh's dream is one; what G-d is doing He has told Pharaoh. The seven good cows are seven years, and the seven good ears of grain are seven years; it is one dream. (Genesis 41:25-26) Both dreams are one dream: the good years and the bad years are part of a single story. (See Ben Ish Chai, Drasot Miletz) What does that mean? Both—times of plenty and times of scarcity—give us the opportunity to bring G-dliness into the world and to help others. This was Joseph's key insight, and it represents his general attitude towards life: Every soul is like a sewing needle. (Sicha of 20 Av 5749) Like the needle's point, we possess the ability to penetrate the fabric and sew things together. We have the ability to pierce through the outer shell and discover that all of creation is but an expression of the one G-d. Just before he passed away, Jacob blessed each of his

children. To Joseph he said, *Ben Porat Yosef* - "A charming son is Joseph." The word Jacob used for charm and beauty, *porat* (פּוֹרֵת), uses the same letters as *poter* (פּוֹתֵר), interpreter, and *tofer* (תּוֹפֵר), sewing. When one learns to (פּוֹתֵר) interpret their life by (תּוֹפֵר) sewing all the details into one story, then life—every part of life—becomes (פּוֹרֵת) beautiful and charming. (Article adapted from *Torah Or, Vayeshev, and Toras Chaim, Vayechi*) By Rabbi Menachem Feldman

**Benevolent Markers** "The master of the land spoke with us harshly!" Joseph's brothers wailed to Jacob. Severe famine engulfed the Middle East, and nations streamed to Egypt, the sole supplier of grain. Among millions of visitors, how many individuals were favored with a personal audience in the private palace of the world's most powerful man? And here the brothers were complaining about their privilege! They had good reason to wail: the character holding Egypt's most influential office had arrested them, accusing them of spying on his superpower. Yet, this same harsh and paranoid ruler trusted the unmasked "spies" to make their way back to Canaan unsupervised. He took a single member of the ten-man team hostage, relying on the verbal assurance of the rest that they would return in due course with proof of their innocence. Everything about the brothers' encounter with Egyptian Joseph was contradictory and counterintuitive, and the trend grew more bizarre with each subsequent meeting. The brothers became bewildered and insecure. Joseph, however, had a plan, based on his divine dreams of many years previous. He would treat his brothers with

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extreme harshness as a way of cleansing them of their sin of having sold their own brother into slavery. He would challenge them to withstand the test of repeating their mistake with Benjamin, at the expense of destroying their own lives. At the same time, Joseph planted a series of benevolent markers that would enable his brothers to recognize him as their brother Joseph when the time came. At just the right moment, he would reveal his identity, and all those gestures of endearment, concern, and highly unusual attention amid the turbulence of their harsh trial would suddenly make sense. Joseph's severity was simply a cover, a necessary but half-hearted tool, while his kindnesses were covert signals of what was really in store for them. In truth, his tools of injustice and calamity were also kindnesses, albeit unfathomable and bitter at the time. By paying closer attention, perhaps the brothers could have figured out the truth on their own, allowing Joseph to end their ordeal all the sooner. Then again, it is extremely difficult to see objectively with a vision confused by despair. *A Veneer Dissolved* Our media reels off strings of heartrending tragedies; our personal lives abound with challenge. For each individual, Heaven has prepared a series of personalized trials. At times, we may throw our hands heavenwards and wail, "The Master of the Land dealt with us harshly!" And we may be quite right. At the same time, there are often well-placed points of light that betray the benevolent identity of the Master of the Land. These signs may not be readily apparent without contemplation, but they certainly exist. Joseph's brothers, in the midst of their travails, were unaware of the excellent ending of their saga; we, however, review their journey in its entirety to recognize the same pattern in our own lives. Just as each person's ordeals are tailor-made, his or her markers are similarly personalized. Sudden rays of comfort appear remarkable amid severe loss. Overtones of salvation infiltrate scenes of destruction. Inexplicable tragedy coincides with unexpected support. A helping hand stretches forth mysteriously from the void. Surprising strength is born when continuation seems impossible. Recognizing these markers brings the realization that our ordeals have their source in a supernal love of a sublime nature, incomprehensible to mortals only due to its intense sublimity. Somehow, our suffering must be for our betterment. Eventually, we will fully appreciate it. Does this awareness remove current pain, undo what has already occurred, or heal the unfixable? In some cases, it may; in most, it cannot. It may alleviate the pain to a degree or facilitate the discovery of a remedy or respite. However, seeking Brother Joseph in our own challenges certainly brings illumination and perhaps even some measure of comfort. More importantly, when combined with deep faith, this attitude must surely make redundant an extended ordeal, allowing the moment when all will be revealed as good to come all the sooner. Back in sweltering Egypt, mighty Joseph struggled to keep his composure as his brothers' distress filled his lavish court. He longed to reconcile. He struggled to keep his guise as long as it was necessary for his brothers' benefit – but not a moment longer. The Master of the Land is also our Merciful Father, a fact we have proclaimed for generations despite the harshness of our history. It is a belief to which we have clung steadfastly. Our souls have broadcast a truth that at times, our minds could not fully explain. For our bond is unbreakable, and we actively seek our Father. Reconsider the details of your own ordeals, and contrast them with the overall scene. Can you find a series of markers, G-d's autograph, even in His rod? Observe the markers, smile at Him, and tell Him that you have seen through His guise. *By Rabbi Yaakov Paley*

*\*Passover order forms have been sent to the Chaplains and Rabbis. Please begin speaking with your Chaplain about Passover.*

**December 22, 2019 – 24 Kislev, 5780**

**Construction of the Second Temple Resumes (353 BCE)**

In the first year of rule of Cyrus, the King of Persia, Jews were given permission to return to Israel and rebuild the Holy Temple. A group of Jews led by Zerubavel set out for Jerusalem and began working on the second Temple. However, the Cutheans falsely accused the Jews of plotting a rebellion against King Cyrus and were successful in halting the construction of the Holy Temple for the remainder of his reign and throughout the reign of Ahasuerus, his successor. Construction resumed in the second year of the reign of Darius, Ahasuerus's son, on the 24th of Kislev.

**December 23, 2019 – 25 Kislev, 5780**

**Chanukah Miracle (139 BCE)**

On the 25th of Kislev in the year 3622 from creation, the Maccabees liberated the Holy Temple in Jerusalem, after defeating the vastly more numerous and powerful armies of the Syrian-Greek king Antiochus IV, who had tried to forcefully uproot the beliefs and practices of Judaism from the people of Israel. The victorious Jews repaired, cleansed and rededicated the Temple to the service of G-d. But all the Temple's oil had been defiled by the pagan invaders; when the Jews sought to light the Temple's menorah (candelabra), they found only one small cruse of ritually pure olive oil. Miraculously, the one-day supply burned for eight days, until new, pure oil could be obtained. In commemoration, the Sages instituted the 8-day festival of Chanukah, on which lights are kindled nightly to recall and publicize the miracle.

**December 23, 2019 – 25 Kislev, 5780**

**Cain Kills Abel (3720 BCE)**

The first murder in history occurred on the 25th of Kislev in the year 41 from creation (3720 BCE), when Adam and Eve's eldest son, Cain, killed his younger brother, Abel, as recounted in the 4th chapter of Genesis.

**December 24, 2019 – 26 Kislev, 5780**

**Raavad's Passing (1198)**

Rabbi Avraham ben David of Posquieres (Provence), known by the acronym "Raavad">, wrote the famed *hagaot* critical notations to Maimonides' Mishneh Torah. Born approximately 1120, he passed away on the 26th of Kislev of the year 4959 from creation (1198).

**December 24, 2019 – 26 Kislev, 5780**

**Oldest US Synagogue Dedicated (1763)**

On this date, the "Touro Synagogue" was dedicated in Newport, Rhode Island. The synagogue, named after Isaac Touro, its first officiating rabbi, is the oldest American synagogue still standing in its original structure.

**December 25, 2019 – 27 Kislev, 5780**

**Flood rains cease (2105 BCE)**

The forty days and nights of rainfall which covered the face of earth with water in Noah's time ended on Kislev 27 of the year 1656 from creation (2105 BCE). The flood itself lasted a full year, as related in Genesis 6-8).

**December 25, 2019 – 27 Kislev, 5780**

**2nd liberation of R. Schneur Zalman of Liadi (1800)**

Two years after his arrest and liberation in 1798 Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi (founder of Chabad, 1745-1812) was arrested a second time; again, the charges were that his teachings undermined the imperial authority of the Czar. His second incarceration was less severe than the first; yet Chassidim mark the anniversary of his release on the third day of Chanukah with *farbrengens* (Chassidic gatherings) and the study of his teachings. According to other versions of the story, the liberation occurred on the fifth day of Chanukah. Apparently, the liberation happened in two stages.