

Torah Weekly

THE ART OF DELEGATION

When I was twenty, a friend and I spent a weekend organizing a shabbaton in a small synagogue somewhere in America. The rabbi of the congregation was a wonderful person who had been in his position for over fifty years. I remember looking around at the tiny vestibule of the poky little synagogue, and the sparse crowd of congregants, and wondering how a person with such obvious talent and charisma could have spent so long in the one place and have seemingly so little to show for all his efforts.

I glimpsed a partial solution to the mystery as I started setting up the tables for the meal; right behind me, every step of the way, came the venerable octogenarian, straightening chairs and reorganizing my cutlery settings. The man was congenitally unable to let go. He took personal charge of the children's service, demonstrated to the waiters the correct method of serving soup, led the Grace after Meals and interrupted every speaker with a running commentary of corrections and suggestions. He worked so hard and meant so well, yet the shabbaton was a shambles.

It's hard to hand over control; trusting others to do the job without you. It is so tempting to insist on staying in the loop, finessing and finicking every single detail. If a job is worth doing, it's worth doing right, and isn't the only way to guarantee perfection doing it yourself?

But you can't do it all. You have to be willing to lean on others and work together for a common goal. Many hands make light work and the mark of a successful leader is the ability to step back and allow others their turn in the limelight.

When I think of successful models of leadership I think of the Rebbe who empowered so many to live for his vision and trusted them to work out the details for themselves. The Rebbe didn't usually tell us what to do or how to do it; he just inspired us with the self-confidence to try, and then allowed us to map out our own path to success.

Micromanaging

Yet, as I write this, I think back to the thousands of hours the Rebbe devoted to serving the needs and whims of individuals. If he had mastered the art of delegation why did he personally have to stand for

hours every Sunday handing out dollar bills for people to place in charity? Why personally sign the thousands of letters that went through his office? Surely the proper function of a leader is to decide policy and set the general tone and direction, and then to allow his faceless bureaucrats to grease the wheels of routine governance.

Perhaps an answer can be sourced from this week's Torah reading, Joseph was "the ruler of the land" (Genesis 42:6), and also the most successful Jew to ever stride the world's financial markets. It was his drive and sense of vision that saved the world from starvation.

Yet the very same verse continues: "He was the one who provided grain to all the people of the land." I can just imagine the scene: Joseph standing at the front door of his granary, greeting every one of the thousands of starving peasants with a smile and cheery word and personally handing over the precious grain that meant life in times of famine.

Sure, he would have had sufficient flunkies and lackeys to take care of the nitty-gritties of corporate governance and routine existence, yet a true leader never forgets that to serve the simple needs of the common people is the highest calling to which one can aspire.

It is so difficult, yet so crucial, to maintain balance; thinking globally, acting locally. Trusting others to lead in their own right, yet never removing oneself entirely from the mundane wants and needs of the entire flock. There is no shame in asking others for their help, or learning how to delegate, but never, ever insulate yourself in an ivory tower of privilege. True leadership doesn't mean doing it all yourself, yet being a true leader means doing it all for others.

*By Rabbi Elisha Greenbaum
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JOSEPH'S WISDOM

Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, has two dreams, we learn in this week's Torah portion. In the first, Pharaoh sees himself standing over the Nile River, *And, behold, there came up out of the River seven cows, handsome and fat of flesh, and they fed in the reed grass. And, behold, seven other cows came up after them out of the River, ugly and lean of flesh, and stood by the other cows upon the bank of the River. And the ugly and lean cows ate up the seven handsome and fat cows.* - Genesis 41:1-4
In the second dream, Pharaoh sees

seven thin, shriveled ears of grain swallow seven fat ears of grain.

None of the wise men of Egypt can offer Pharaoh a satisfactory interpretation of his dreams. Then, the "young Hebrew slave," Joseph, is summoned from the dungeon to the palace. Joseph interprets the dreams to mean that seven years of plenty, symbolized by the fat cows and fat grain, will be followed by seven years of hunger, reflected by the lean cows and the shriveled ears. The seven years of famine will be so powerful that they will "swallow up" and obliterate any trace of the years of plenty.

Joseph then advises Pharaoh how to deal with the situation: "Now Pharaoh must seek out a man with insight and wisdom and place him in charge of Egypt." A rationing system will have to be set up over Egypt during the seven years of surplus, Joseph explains, in which grain will be stored for the upcoming years of famine.

Pharaoh is blown away by Joseph's vision. "Can there be another person who has G-d's spirit in him as this man does?" Pharaoh asks his advisors. "There is none as understanding and wise as you," he says to Joseph. "You shall be over my house, and according to your word shall all my people be ruled; only by the throne will I outrank you."

Joseph is thus appointed viceroy of Egypt. The rest is history.

Three Questions

The Biblical commentators struggle with three major questions concerning this remarkable story.

A) It is difficult to understand how, following his interpretation of the dreams, Joseph proceeded to give Pharaoh advice on how to deal with the impending famine. How is a newly liberated slave not afraid to offer the king of Egypt, the monarch who ruled a superpower, unsolicited advice? Pharaoh summoned Joseph from the dungeon to interpret his dreams, not to become an advisor to the king!

B) It is obvious from the narrative that Pharaoh was actually awestruck by Joseph's solution to the problem. But one need not be a rocket scientist to suggest that if you have seven years of plenty followed by seven years of famine, you should store food during the time of plenty for the time of hunger. What's the genius in Joseph's advice?

C) Pharaoh also was amazed by Joseph's interpretation of the

PARSHAT MIKEITZ

24 - 30 Kislev 5786
14 - 20 December 2025

MONDAY

Torah: Numbers 7:1-17

TUESDAY

Torah: Numbers 7:18-29

WEDNESDAY

Torah: Numbers 7:24-35

THURSDAY

Torah: Numbers 7:30-41

FRIDAY

Torah: Numbers 7:36-47

SHABBAT

Torah: Genesis 41:1-44:17
Numbers 28:9-15; Numbers 7:42-47

Haftorah: Rosh Chodesh/Chanukah

PSALMS DAILY

Psalms for our brethren in the Holy Land

Psalm 117

1. Praise the Lord, all nations, laud Him, all peoples.

2. For His kindness has overwhelmed us, and the truth of the Lord is eternal. Hallelujah!

(Please say Chapter 20 daily)

SEFER HAMITZVOT

Negative Mitzvah 234 Demanding Payment from a Destitute Borrower

It is forbidden to demand payment of a debt from a borrower if the lender is aware that the borrower has not the means to repay; the lender should not even pass before the borrower lest his presence, and the acute awareness that he owes him money, shame him].

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dreams themselves, which none of his own wise men could conceive. But Joseph's interpretation seems simple and obvious. When are cows fat? When there is lots of food. When are they lean? When there's no food. When is grain fat? When there is a plentiful harvest. When is grain lean? During a time of famine. So why was Pharaoh astonished by Joseph's rendition of his dreams? And why could no one else conceive of the same interpretation?

Uniting the Cows

During a Shabbat address in 1973, the Lubavitcher Rebbe presented the following explanation:

The dream experts of Egypt did indeed conceive of Joseph's interpretation to Pharaoh's dreams - namely, that seven years of hunger would follow seven years of plenty. Yet they dismissed this interpretation from their minds, because it did not account for one important detail of the dream.

In Pharaoh's first dream, he saw how the seven ugly and lean cows that came up after the seven handsome cows "stood near the other [fat] cows upon the bank of the River." In other words, there was a moment during which both sets of cows coexisted simultaneously, and only afterward did the lean cows proceed to swallow the fat cows.

It was this detail of the dream that caused the wise men of Egypt to reject the interpretation that Joseph would later offer to Pharaoh, and compelled them to present all types of farfetched explanations.

For how is it possible that plenty and famine should coexist? Either you have fat cows alone or you have lean cows alone, but you can't have them both together! The seven years of famine cannot be present during the seven years of surplus.

This is where Joseph's brilliance was dazzlingly displayed. When Joseph proceeded to tell Pharaoh how to prepare for the coming famine, he was not offering him unwelcome advice on how to run his country; rather, the advice was part of the dream's interpretation. Joseph understood that the coexistence of the two sets of cows contained the solution to the approaching famine: During the years of plenty, Egypt must "live" with the years of famine as well, as though they were already present. Even while enjoying the abundance of

the years of plenty, Egypt must experience in its imagination the reality of the upcoming famine, and each and every day store away food for it. The seven lean cows ought to be very much present and alive in people's minds and in their behavior during the era of the seven fat cows.

Conversely, if this system was implemented in Egypt, then even during the years of famine, the nation would continue enjoying the abundance of the years of plenty. The seven fat cows would be very much present and alive, even during the era of the seven lean cows.

This is what impressed Pharaoh so deeply about Joseph's interpretation. To begin with, Pharaoh was struck by Joseph's ingenious accounting for that one detail of the dream that had evaded all of the wise men of Egypt.

But what thrilled him even more was Joseph's demonstration of the fact that Pharaoh's dreams not only contained a prediction of future events, but also offered instructions on how to deal with those events. The dreams did not only portend problems, but also proffered solutions.

Do You Need G-d? Do You Have a Real Friend?

The wisdom of Joseph's presentation to Pharaoh becomes strikingly clear when we reflect upon the spiritual message behind the story. For, as we have noted a number of times, the stories of the Torah describe not only physical events that took place at a certain point in history, but also detail metaphysical and timeless tales occurring continuously within the human heart.

All of us experience cycles of plenty and cycles of famine in our lives. There are times when things are going very well: we are healthy, successful and comfortable. Often, during such times, we fail to invest time and energy to cultivate genuine emotional intimacy with our spouses, to develop real relationships with friends, and to create a sincere bond with G-d. We feel self-sufficient, and don't need anybody in our lives.

Yet when a time of famine arrives, when a serious crisis erupts (heaven forbid) in our lives, we suddenly feel the need to reach out beyond ourselves and connect with our loved ones and with G-d.

But we don't know how. Because when we do not nurture our relationships and our spirituality during our years of plenty, then

when the years of famine confront us, we lack the tools we so desperately need to survive the crisis.

This is the essence of Joseph's wisdom: You must never detach the years of plenty from the years of famine. When you experience plenty, do not let it blind your vision and desensitize you from what is truly important in life.

The priorities you cultivate during your "good times" should be of the kind that will sustain you during your "bad times" as well.

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MIKEITZ IN A NUTSHELL

The name of the Parshah, "Miketz," means "At the end" and it is found in Genesis 41:1.

Joseph's imprisonment finally ends when Pharaoh dreams of seven fat cows that are swallowed up by seven lean cows, and of seven fat ears of grain swallowed by seven lean ears. Joseph interprets the dreams to mean that seven years of plenty will be followed by seven years of hunger, and advises Pharaoh to store grain during the plentiful years. Pharaoh appoints Joseph governor of Egypt. Joseph marries Asenath, daughter of Potiphar, and they have two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim.

Famine spreads throughout the region, and food can be obtained only in Egypt. Ten of Joseph's brothers come to Egypt to purchase grain; the youngest, Benjamin, stays home, for Jacob fears for his safety. Joseph recognizes his brothers, but they do not recognize him; he accuses them of being spies, insists that they bring Benjamin to prove that they are who they say they are, and imprisons Simeon as a hostage. Later, they discover that the money they paid for their provisions has been mysteriously returned to them.

Jacob agrees to send Benjamin only after Judah assumes personal and eternal responsibility for him. This time Joseph receives them kindly, releases Simeon, and invites them to an eventful dinner at his home. But then he plants his silver goblet, purportedly imbued with magic powers, in Benjamin's sack. When the brothers set out for home the next morning, they are pursued, searched, and arrested when the goblet is discovered. Joseph offers to set them free and retain only Benjamin as his slave.

IN JEWISH HISTORY

Sunday, 24 Kislev 5786 - 14 December 2025 Construction of the Second Temple Resumes (353 BCE)

In the first year of the 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 Cuthians falsely accused the Jews of plotting a rebellion against King Cyrus and were successful in halting the construction of the Second 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 of the year 3408 (353 BCE).

Monday, 25 Kislev 5786 - 15 December 2025 Chanukah Miracle (139 BCE)

On the 25th of Kislev 3622 (139 BCE), 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.

Tuesday, 26 Kislev 5786 - 16 December 2025 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.