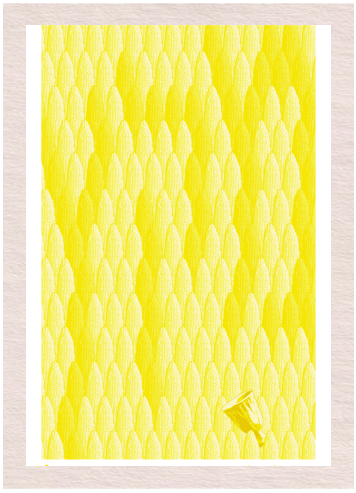
Miketz: Bereshit (Genesis)

What's it all about?



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The Pharaoh has a strange dream about seven lean cows swallowing up seven plump ones, and **Joseph rises to the occasion**, interpreting the dream as a warning sign of an impending hunger. He's released from prison, advises the king to prepare by storing grain, **and is promptly appointed governor of Egypt.** He also marries Potiphar's daughter, and she gives birth to two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim.

Famine indeed comes, and Joseph's ten brothers leave Canaan for Egypt in search of food. Benjamin, the youngest, stays home. **Joseph recognizes his brothers, but they don't recognize him.** He accuses them of being spies, **insists that they send for Benjamin to prove that they are who they say they are**, and holds Simeon hostage until they do. The brothers, however, are surprised to discover that the money they paid for their provisions has been returned to them somehow.

Jacob, meanwhile, agrees to part with Benjamin only after Judah promises his father to be personally responsible for the younger sibling. Upon their return to Egypt, Joseph invites the brothers to a meal in his house, but plants a goblet in Benjamin's bag. When the brothers leave the next morning, they are arrested for theft. Joseph offers to let them go if he could keep Benjamin as his slave.

> "Joseph answered Pharaoh, 'It is not by my own power; God will provide an answer through me for Pharaoh's welfare.'"

Take a deeper dive

Joseph's rise to power is worthy of a Hollywood blockbuster. One moment he's a wrongfully accused convict, fading away in prison; the next he's not only freed but appointed to govern the entirety of the world's greatest empire at the time. It's a dizzying turn of events, so, naturally, it probably drove some to raise an eyebrow or two.

The rabbis of the Talmud, too, pondered that question. Imagine, they argued, what the other Egyptian grandees must've felt when this no-name prisoner was suddenly summoned before the Pharaoh and then, in very short order, elevated as their boss. What was it about Joseph, the rabbis asked, that merited his very rapid rise?

Simple, they explained: **The Pharaoh took one look at the young lad and saw that he was fit for greatness. How come?** Consider what the Torah tells us about their first encounter: "Pharaoh sent for Joseph, and he was hurried out of the dungeon. He had his hair cut in honor of his audience with Pharaoh, changed from his prison clothes into ordinary clothes, and then appeared before Pharaoh." Even though he's in a great hurry, and even though he's a prisoner rushed before the king, he does not compromise his appearance: **He's a dignified man, and before he can permit himself to converse with the monarch, he takes care to shave and change his clothes.**

But that's just the beginning. **Joseph's true greatness is revealed** when, replying to Pharaoh, he makes sure the king knows precisely who's in charge: "Joseph answered Pharaoh, '**It is not by my own power; God will provide an answer through me** for Pharaoh's welfare.'"

A lesser man would've made himself seem great, mighty, indispensable — everything and anything to make sure the king frees him from prison. But Joseph does no such thing. Instead, he pauses to give credit where credit is due, thanking God for giving him a wise heart; only then does he offer practical solutions to Pharaoh's problems. These lessons — **hold yourself to a higher standard, stay humble, and work hard to make the world better** — make Joseph the Torah's first politician, setting the way for public servants to come.

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