

**Extracted from: Three Approaches to Dreams, by Jonathan Sacks.**

“In one of the greatest transformations in all literature, Joseph moves in a single bound from prisoner to Prime Minister. What was it about Joseph – a complete outsider to Egyptian culture, a “Hebrew,” a man who had been languishing in jail on a false charge of attempted rape – that marked him out as a leader of the greatest empire of the ancient world?”

“Joseph had three gifts that many have in isolation but few in combination. *The first is that he dreamed dreams.* Initially we do not know whether his two adolescent dreams – of his brothers’ sheaves bowing down to his, and of the sun, moon and eleven stars bowing down to him – are a genuine presentiment of future greatness, or merely the overactive imagination of a spoiled child with delusions of grandeur.”

“Only in this week’s parsha *Mikketz* do we discover a vital piece of information that has been withheld from us until now. Joseph says to Pharaoh, who has also had two dreams: “The reason the dream was given to Pharaoh in two forms is that the matter has been firmly decided by God, and God will do it soon” (Gen. 41:32). Only in retrospect do we realise that Joseph’s double dream was a sign that this, too, was no mere imagining. Joseph really was destined to be a leader to whom his family would bow down.”

Second, like Sigmund Freud many centuries years later, Joseph had a gift for interpreting the dreams of others. He did so for the butler and baker in prison and, in this week’s parsha, for Pharaoh. His interpretations were neither magical nor miraculous. In the case of the butler and baker he remembered that in three days’ time it would be Pharaoh’s birthday (Gen. 40:20). It was the custom of rulers to make a feast on their birthday and decide the fate of certain individuals. (In Britain, the Queen’s birthday honours continue this tradition.) It was reasonable therefore to assume that the butler’s and baker’s dreams related to this event and their unconscious hopes and fears.[1]

***I was in distress on the Great Throne, and those who were in the palace were in heart’s affliction from a very great evil, since the Nile had not come in my time for a space of seven years. Grain was scant, fruits were dried up, and everything which they eat was short.[2]***

Joseph's most impressive achievement, though, was his third gift, the ability to implement dreams, solving the problem of which they were an early warning. No sooner had he told of a seven-year famine than he continued, without pause, to provide a solution:

Theodor Herzl, to whom more than any other person we owe the existence of the State of Israel, used to say, "If you will it, it is no dream." I once heard a wonderful story from Eli Wiesel. There was a time when Sigmund Freud and Theodor Herzl lived in the same district of Vienna. "Fortunately," he said, "they never met. Can you imagine what would have happened had they met? Herzl would have said: 'I have a dream of a Jewish state.' Freud would have replied: 'Tell me, Herr Herzl, how long have you been having this dream? Lie down on my couch, and I will psychoanalyse you.' Herzl would have been cured of his dreams and today there would be no Jewish state."

Thankfully, the Jewish people have never been cured of their dreams.

**(Gen. 41:33-36) "Now let Pharaoh look for a discerning and wise man and put him in charge of the land of Egypt. Let Pharaoh appoint commissioners over the land to take a fifth of the harvest of Egypt during the seven years of abundance. They should collect all the food of these good years that are coming and store up the grain under the authority of Pharaoh, to be kept in the cities for food. This food should be held in reserve for the country, to be used during the seven years of famine that will come upon Egypt, so that the country may not be ruined by the famine."**

Good leaders either are, or surround themselves with, problem-solvers. It is easy to see when things are going wrong. What makes a leader is the ability to find a way of putting them right. Joseph's genius lay not in predicting seven years of plenty followed by seven years of famine, but in devising a system of storage that would ensure food supplies in the lean and hungry years.

**Dream dreams; understand and articulate the dreams of others; and find ways of turning a dream into a reality – these three gifts are leadership, the Joseph way.**

