

Torah Thoughts Vayeisheiv 5778

5778:

Experience can really make the difference at work. There is very little at this point in my career as rabbi, for instance, that I have not seen before, and each time a familiar episode recurs, I know a little better how to deal with it. I'm sure all other jobs are the same; we get better at them the more we do them. Joseph has a similar learning curve in this week's parshah in his 'work' as a dream interpreter.

At the beginning of parshat Vayeisheiv, Joseph has dreams that he describes to his family. He only tells them what he saw in the dream: His brothers' sheaves bowing down to his and the sun, moon and eleven stars bowing down to him. He lets others do the interpreting, and they draw the obvious conclusion that Joseph, second to youngest of twelve brothers, dreams of ruling over his entire family. The shock and presumption of those dreams spur Joseph's brothers to kill him, though in the end they merely sell him into slavery.

Joseph ends up in prison in Egypt. There he interprets the dreams of others, and is so good at it that he is taken to interpret Pharaoh's dreams. That, in turn, goes so well that Joseph is elevated to second in command of all Egypt. What changed? It seems that Joseph learned the lesson that describing the 'raw data' of dreams is not enough. What is required is an artful way of making meaning of those dreams. When he does so in a way that pleases those around him and that seems corroborated by events, he succeeds wildly. Dreaming is Joseph's area of expertise from a young age, but while he suffers for it as a young man, he soon learns how to use that gift to benefit others as well as benefiting himself.

What Joseph seems to have mastered is the art of self-awareness. Dreams are a kind of prophecy for him, and can be good or bad news. Joseph learns to communicate interpretations effectively after a clumsy start that almost cost him his life. By being aware of his own capabilities and how best to utilize them, he improves his own lot, that of all Egypt and ultimately, that of his entire extended family. May each of us mature as Joseph did, allowing experience to sharpen our skills while it dulls our own sharp edges.

Shabbat shalom