

Miketz and Shabbat Chanukah, by R' Berel Wein

- Rabbi Berel Wein, on his web site archives, yields a gem explaining Joseph's honesty interpreting Pharaoh's dreams even if unpalatable, and comparing this to the honesty of the Macabbees telling unpalatable truth to their brother Jews.

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The Torah reading of Miketz traditionally marches in lock step with the holiday of Hanukah so that it is almost always read on the Shabat of Hanukah. Since Jews know that there are no coincidences in Jewish tradition and life, it must therefore follow that there is a deep and lasting connection between the Torah reading of Miketz and the holiday of Hanukah. I have always felt that one of the connections between Miketz and Hanukah lies in the willingness to be unpopular in the present in order to be judged correct in the future.

In the Torah reading of Miketz, Yosef interprets Pharaoh's dream in an accurate, truthful, and prophetic, but basically critical and unflattering fashion. He tells Pharaoh that there will be a horrid famine and that the Egyptian authorities are unprepared for it. Pharaoh's own rule will be threatened unless he changes his governmental policies, prepares adequately for the future, and does not squander the prosperity of the present and immediate future. It is in the nature of all governments to sacrifice the tomorrow for the today, to turn a blind eye to the future and bask in the glory of the apparent successes of the here and now.

Pharaoh had many advisers that attempted to interpret his troubling dreams. But unlike Yosef, they were sycophants, who only fawned on the monarch's vanity and told him nothing that would affect his governmental policies. They told him that all the disasters were not because of him. They said they were not preventable and weren't his fault. But Pharaoh himself is untouched by his advisers' interpretations. Only Yosef, imprisoned and alien, dares tell him the unpopular truth, the politically incorrect but accurate interpretation of the dreams that so haunt the Pharaoh and give him no rest, neither in the day or in the night. But it is that truth, unpleasant and unwelcome, that will save Pharaoh's throne and Egypt itself.

Hanukah essentially repeats the same message of telling and facing the unpopular truth in Jewish life and history. The Syrian Greeks possessed an attractive and civilized culture. The Jews, with their old-fashioned rituals and strait-laced Torah morality, appeared primitive and backward in comparison with the Syrian Greeks and their life style. Tens of thousands of Jews defected to the side of the Syrian Greeks and became Hellenists. And they demanded that the Jews who remained loyal to the Torah and values of their ancestors not only accept them as Hellenists, but also agree that they were the ones to lead the Jewish people into that brave, new Greek world. They were not willing to face the awful truth that Hellenizing Jews would eventually mean the destruction of the Jewish people and Torah Judaism.

A small band of Jews, the family of the Hashmonaim, not only fought the Syrian Greeks, liberated the holy Temple and rekindled its menorah the symbol of Torah purity, but perhaps, even more importantly, they told the truth to the Jewish people the unpleasant, politically

incorrect, jarring, divisive, intolerant truth. They stated that you cannot have a Jewish people composed of non-Jews, no matter how nice and fine people those individuals may be. Judaism without a Sabbath or true Jewish ritual and one that refuses to make the hard and necessary Jewish demands on its constituency will not contribute to Jewish growth. A Jewish community that does not give its young an intensive Jewish education, but willingly, almost desperately, spends its talent and wealth pursuing general social projects that change with the constantly varying popular perceptions of society will not ensure Jewish survival.

The difficulties of the Jewish future, which are now already apparent to all thinking Jews, are foolishly and irresponsibly ignored and their solutions sacrificed to the comfort and false unity of the present. That was not the way of Yosef or of the Chashmonaim.

Good Shabbos and Happy Hanukah Rabbi Berel Wein