

December 15, 2012 – Miketz (Genesis 41:1 – 44:17)

Miketz is the second of the four sidrahs which tell the story of Joseph. In this portion, Joseph is brought from prison to interpret Pharaoh's dream(s) of seven fat years and seven lean years, represented by cattle in one case and ears of grain in the other. Because these dreams have a single message, some sources consider them to be one dream. Joseph advises Pharaoh to appoint a man of discernment and wisdom to ensure that Egypt does not starve in the lean years, and Pharaoh picks Joseph.

One of the things we looked at was Joseph's age. Genesis 41:46 says that Joseph was 30 when he entered Pharaoh's service. We know from the text that he was 17 when his brothers threw him into the pit in the wilderness, and that he was in prison in Egypt for two years before being brought before Pharaoh. That leaves 11 years of his life unspecified, but he must have been growing and changing. Then he spent the seven fat years helping Egypt gather the foodstuffs which would carry them through the famine. So he was at least 37 when his brothers came down to Egypt to get food, since the famine had spread to Canaan, too. It was hardly strange that they did not recognize him, even if they had never seen him with a shaven face before.

This is a story which, throughout, emphasizes emotion and spirituality. The Torah leaves out a lot of the details, and yet it clearly states that Joseph was forced to leave the room in which his brother Benjamin and the others sit, because he needed to weep, "overcome with feeling." We are given the picture of a man who has risen to one of the most powerful positions in the civilized world dealing with the reality of his family.