

Parashah Vayeshev

The one with the story of Joseph, the favored son of Jacob, and his dream coat and brothers.

Parashah Vayeshev begins with Joseph, Jacob's very good-looking son, having two dreams. Joseph's first dream involves sheaves (or stalks) of wheat in a field, where his brothers' sheaves bow down to his. In the second dream, he sees the sun, the moon, and 11 stars bowing down to him, symbolizing his family members. These dreams intensify the jealousy and anger among his brothers, who feel he is being favored unfairly by their father. Jacob gives Joseph a special coat of many colors, which creates more resentment by his brothers. This coat is a symbol of Jacob's favoritism, and it becomes a central element in the deception that follows. It also reveals his boastful character.

Joseph's brothers, angry and envious, decide to get him out of their lives. When Jacob, ignoring the obvious danger that might occur, sends Joseph to check on his brothers, who are tending their father's flocks far from home, the brothers seize the opportunity. They initially plan to kill Joseph but eventually decide to throw him into a pit and sell him into slavery to a passing group of traders heading to Egypt. Reuben, the eldest brother, initially plans to rescue Joseph but is absent when the others decide to sell him to a caravan of Ishmaelites.

Joseph's brothers deceive their father by dipping Joseph's special coat of many colors in goat's blood and presenting it to their father, Jacob, making him believe that Joseph was killed by a wild animal. Jacob is devastated by the loss of his son, ignoring the pain they cause him.

Joseph is taken to Egypt and sold as a slave to an Egyptian named Potiphar, an officer of the pharaoh. Joseph rises in favor due to his intelligence, trustworthiness, and ability to interpret dreams. In Potiphar's house, Joseph excels as a servant and is put in charge of his master's household.

Joseph faces temptation when Potiphar's wife tries to use him to make her husband jealous. He resists her advances, but she falsely accuses him of misconduct, leading to Joseph's imprisonment. In prison, Joseph's ability to interpret dreams comes into play again. He interprets the dreams of two fellow inmates, the royal cupbearer and the royal baker. The cupbearer's dream predicts his release and return to Pharaoh's service, while the baker's dream foretells his execution. These interpretations prove accurate.

Parashah Vayeshev lays the foundation for Joseph's eventual rise to power in Egypt and his reunion with his family. It explores themes of jealousy, deceit, and moral integrity while foreshadowing the great role Joseph will play in the future of his people.

Teen Takeaways from Parashah Vayeshev

- 1. Sibling rivalry and reconciliation:** The parashah begins with the story of Joseph and his brothers. It highlights the destructive nature of jealousy and sibling rivalry but also teaches the importance of reconciliation and forgiveness within families.
2. Joseph not only has these dreams, but also reveals them to his brothers! Do we have to tell everything to everyone, or are there things that are better kept to ourselves? Were there words that you shared with someone that changed your relationship in a negative way? Have you withheld things from people so you would not hurt their feelings?
- 3. The consequences of favoritism:** Jacob's favoritism toward Joseph creates tension and strife within the family. This underscores the importance of treating all children fairly and avoiding favoritism. Do parents have favorites? If they do, do they show it or try their best to treat all their kids with favor?
4. When kids notice parental favoritism, do they get angry at their parents, or do they take it out on their siblings?
- 5. Resisting temptation:** The story of Joseph and Potiphar's wife teaches the lesson of maintaining moral integrity and resisting temptation, even when facing great pressure.
- 6. False accusations:** The false accusation against Joseph and his subsequent imprisonment demonstrate the importance of truth and justice. It serves as a reminder to be cautious when making accusations without evidence. Have you ever jumped to conclusions and later discovered you were wrong?
- 7. Interpreting dreams:** Joseph's ability to interpret dreams leads to his rise in Egypt. This can be seen as a lesson in the importance of using one's talents and abilities to help others and contribute to society. What is your special talent? How can you use it to make the world a better place? In a bar/bat Mitzvah project?
- 8. Patience and resilience:** Joseph's journey from being sold into slavery to becoming a high-ranking official in Egypt teaches the values of patience, resilience, and perseverance through challenging circumstances. Some things that might seem to be bad at first turn out to be opportunities for good. The Hebrew words for danger and for opportunity - "sakana" and "sikun" - come from the same origin.
- 9. The role of providence:** The parashah emphasizes the idea that events in one's life may be part of a larger, divine plan. This can encourage faith and a sense of purpose in challenging times. How does looking back help us to make sense of things when we are confused while they are happening?
- 10. Forgiveness:** Toward the end of the parashah, when Joseph forgives his brothers, it demonstrates the power of forgiveness and reconciliation. Holding onto grudges can lead to personal and familial suffering. Joseph breaks into tears. Is crying a sign of sadness or happiness?
- 11. Leadership and wisdom:** Joseph's leadership qualities and wisdom are evident throughout the parashah. This highlights the importance of using leadership positions wisely and justly. Contemporary politics lead us to believe that power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. But can you think of good use of power in history? How about in your life so far?
- 12. Family unity:** Despite the challenges and trials faced by Joseph and his family, the parashah ultimately underscores the value of family unity and the importance of coming together in times of need. What does it mean to say "blood is thicker than water"?
- 13. Planning and preparation:** The story of Joseph's interpretation of Pharaoh's dreams and the subsequent famine teaches the importance of planning, preparedness, and wise governance in times of crisis. What do you think of the phrase "luck is when preparation meets opportunity"? Do you pray or study before a test - or both?

14. **Honoring commitments:** Joseph honors the commitment he made to interpret Pharaoh's dreams, even after he's released from prison. This illustrates the importance of keeping one's promises and fulfilling obligations.
15. **The power of dreams:** Throughout the parashah, dreams play a significant role. This encourages reflection on the significance of dreams, both in the biblical context and in personal lives. Psychiatry, which pays much attention to dreams and their meaning, is a scientific field that has been created and dominated in large part by people with Jewish backgrounds, including Sigmund Freud. Why do you think that is true?
16. **Dreams are letters we write to ourselves:** Can you remember one of your dreams?

Summary

Parashah Vayeshev offers a rich tapestry of lessons on **moral values, family dynamics, personal character, and the role of faith in one's life**. These lessons continue to be relevant and provide valuable guidance for individuals facing various challenges and decisions in their own lives.

