

ANTI-SEMITISM

JOSEPH IN EGYPT

See how the משקים שר tells Pharaoh about the man—Joseph—who interpreted his dreams in prison (מא:ט-יב)

וַיְדַבֵּר שֵׁר הַמִּשְׁקִים אֶת־פַּרְעֹה לֵאמֹר אֶת־חֲטָאֵי אֲנִי מִזְכִּיר הַיּוֹם:

פַּרְעֹה קָצַף עַל־עַבְדּוֹ וַיִּתֵּן אֹתוֹ בְּמִשְׁמֶר בַּיִת שֵׁר הַטַּבָּחִים אֹתוֹ וְאֵת שֵׁר הָאֲפִים:

וַנְּחַלְמָה חֲלוֹם בְּלַיְלָה אֶחָד אֲנִי וְהוּא אִישׁ כְּפַתְרוֹן חֲלָמוֹת חֲלָמָנוּ:

וְשָׁם אֲתַנּוּ נַעַר עֲבָרֵי עֶבֶד לְשֵׁר הַטַּבָּחִים וְנִסְפָּר־לוֹ וַיִּפְתָּר־לָנוּ אֶת־חֲלָמֵתֵינוּ אִישׁ כְּחֲלָמוֹ פֶּתַר:

1) What does the משקים שר call Joseph?

2) How does Rashi explain the meaning of the משקים שר's description?

נַעַר עֲבָרֵי עַבְד. חֲרוּרִים הָרָשָׁעִים, שְׂחִין טוֹבָחַם שְׂלֵמָה, מִזְכִּירוֹ בְּלִשׁוֹן בְּיָוֶן:

בַּנַּעַר. שְׂוֶקָה וְיָוֶן רָחוּי לְגִדְלָה:

גַּעֲבָרֵי. חֲפָלוֹ לְשׂוֹנְנוֹ חִינוֹ מִפִּיר:

לַעֲבָד. וְכַתּוּב בְּנִמְרוֹסֵי מִלְרִים שְׂחִין עֶבֶד מוֹלֵד וְלֹא לוֹבֵשׁ בְּגָדֵי שָׂרִים:

הָאִישׁ כַּחֲלָמוֹ. לְפִי הַחֲלוֹם וְקִרְוֹב לְעֵנִינוּ:

3) See this quote from Rabbi Sacks and consider: What contradictions are at play in the story of the משקים שר?¹

¹ (what is he trying to accomplish by sharing this information with Pharaoh? Why did he wait to mention Joseph to pharaoh until now?)

"The majesty and mystery of Judaism is that, though at best Jews were a small people in a small land, no match for the circumambient empires that periodically assaulted them, Jews did not give way to self-hate, self-disesteem or despair." (Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, *Ceremony & Celebration*, p. 85)

4) How do we see this quote from Rabbi Sacks manifest in the case of the שר המשקים?

Rabbi Sacks on Anti-Semitism as a Virus

What is antisemitism? It is less a doctrine or set of beliefs than a **series of contradictions**. In the past Jews were hated because they were rich and because they were poor, because they were capitalists and because they were communists, because they kept to themselves and because they infiltrated everywhere, because they held tenaciously to a superstitious faith and because they were rootless cosmopolitans who believed nothing.

The best way to understand **antisemitism is to see it as a virus**. Viruses attack the human body, but the body itself has an immensely sophisticated defence, the human immune system. How, then, **do viruses survive and flourish? By mutating**. (Future Tense: Jews, Judaism and Israel in the 21st Century (Schocken, 2012): p. 92.)

5) With this perspective in mind, how would/should Joseph interact with Pharaoh and how should he express his Judaism?

See מא:טו-ז

ויאמר פרעה אל-יוסף חלום חלמתי ופתר אין אתו ונאני שמעתי עליך לאמר תשמע חלום לפתור אתו:

ונען יוסף את-פרעה לאמר בלעדי אלקים נענה את-שלום פרעה:

6) How **does** Joseph express his Judaism to Pharaoh?

No matter how much hostility he encountered on account of his novel ideas and strange thoughts, Joseph refused to change, to act like anyone else in the pastoral society. Indeed, "His bow remained in imperturbable rest." Joseph was not impressed by the formidable opposition he encountered. He

did not deny his identity, his way of life, his self-esteem and determination to be himself. He could not submerge or obliterate his distinctiveness. (Rabbi Soloveitchik², Vision and Leadership, p.7)

7) When faced with Anti-Semitism, how can **we** react?

“If you were to ask what our response to the Holocaust should be, I would say this: Marry and have children, bring new Jewish life into the world, build schools, make communities, have faith in God who had faith in man and make sure that His voice is heard wherever evil threatens. Pursue justice, defend the defenceless, have the courage to be different and fight for the dignity of difference. Recognise the image of God in others, and defeat hate with love. Twice a year, on Yom HaShoah and the Ninth of Av, sit and mourn for those who died and remember them in your prayer. But most of all, continue to live as Jews.” (*Radical Then, Radical Now*, p. 184)

JOSEPH THE “IVRI”

Joseph did not act in consonance with this rule. The hate which he aroused in his brothers was mainly due to the fact that he stood out among them. He was distinct and different; in the pastoral, nomadic, and carefree community where he was raised, his actions were peculiar. His contemporaries could not understand when he spoke of a different economy--agriculture--and of people who did not wander from spot to spot living like parasites off the fat of the land. He envisioned people who had allegiance to the land and who displayed determination to force Mother Nature to feed its inhabitants, honest people who were ready to work, till, and irrigate. The shepherds heard in amazement this fantastic story: "For, behold, we were binding sheaves in the field, and lo, my sheaf arose and stood upright; and behold, your sheaves stood round about and bowed down to my sheaf" (Gen. 37:7). They were taken aback not so much by the fact that he saw himself as the central figure and master, but by the very story that placed himself and them within a different society, not a pastoral but an agricultural one.

² It is always interesting to note that whenever Rabbi Soloveitchik spoke about Joseph, we are left to wonder if he was only talking about the biblical character, or himself: Rabbi Joseph B Soloveitchik...

They resented his strangeness and singular way of seeing things more than they resented the egocentricity they wrongly imputed to him. "They embittered him and were hostile to him" (Gen. 49:23) because he beheld visions, prophesying and preaching social change. He disturbed the primitive sense of peace that entranced the naive and gullible pastoral society. The brothers were angered by Joseph's dreams and visions. "They hated him yet more for his dreams" (Gen. 37:8). They felt that in his dreams there was a spark of truth, that the voice of God broke through those dreams. But they could not listen to them. (Rabbi Soloveitchik, Vision and Leadership, p.7)

- 8) What was so important to Joseph that it was worth standing apart, even from his brothers?
- 9) Is there anything that you care about enough to stand out for?

STANDING OUT AND APART

Look at Vayigash מ:ג-ו Joseph instructs his brothers in their meeting with Pharaoh.

- 10) With what profession does he tell them to identify?

וַיֹּאמֶר פַּרְעֹה אֶל-אֶחָיו מִה-פְּעֻשֵׁיכֶם וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֶל-פַּרְעֹה רַעְיָה צֹאן עֹבְדֵיךָ גַם-אֲנַחְנוּ גַם-אֲבוֹתֵינוּ:
וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֶל-פַּרְעֹה לְגֹר בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן כִּי-אֵין מְרֻעָה לָצֹאן אֲשֶׁר לַעֲבָדֶיךָ כִּי-כִבֵּד הָרַעַב בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן וְעַתָּה
יָשְׁבוּ-נָא עִבְדֶיךָ בְּאֶרֶץ גֹּשֶׁן:
וַיֹּאמֶר פַּרְעֹה אֶל-יֹסֵף לֵאמֹר אֲבִיךָ וְאֶחָיךָ בָּאוּ אֵלֶיךָ:
אֲרָץ מִצְרַיִם לְפָנֶיךָ הוּא בְּמִיטַב הָאֲרֶץ הוֹשֵׁב אֶת-אֲבִיךָ וְאֶת-אֶחָיךָ יָשְׁבוּ בְּאֶרֶץ גֹּשֶׁן וְאִם-גִּדְעַתָּ וַיִּשְׁ-בָּם
אֲנִשְׁי-חֵיל וְשִׁמְתֶם שְׂרֵי מִקְנֵה עַל-אֲשֶׁר-לִי:

- 11) How do you think this specific profession is regarded in the land of Egypt, a land which worships lambs?

- 12) What do you think Joseph was trying to accomplish?

Joseph's strength manifested itself in the strange ability to survive with a separate spiritual identity under circumstances and conditions that warranted complete assimilation and integration. Aristotle long ago said that man is a social animal prone to join the society in which he lives, to adopt its ways and mores and level of individual distinctiveness. Man does not want to be unique and singular; he

refuses to be noticeable, to stand out and hence expose himself to loneliness and isolation, which in turn breed antagonism. (Rabbi Soloveitchik, Vision and Leadership, p.6)³

13) If the brothers stand out in Egyptian society, how will that impact the experience in Egypt?

When I was a student in Yeshiva University, Rabbi Sacks ended his two decade tenure as the Chief Rabbi of the UK. What Britain lost, we gained, because he became an adjunct professor in YU for a semester. I remember the Sunday morning that he spoke about Purim in a packed Glueck Beit Midrash. Below is the end of his remarkable address⁴:

There is one question left, and I end with this story. What should we do as Jews to fight antisemitism? And I am going to give you an unexpected answer, but it's a very important one. And I learned this from a *charedi* Rav in Manchester, actually Manchester just is *charedi*, but it's a very holy city and it does some wonderful things. And I don't know, the young people here won't remember this at all, (but *na'ar hayitti gam zakanti*, I remember this...) in the late 1980s when the former Soviet Union was beginning to open up, it was the era of *perestroika* and *glasnost*, for the first time in 70 years Jews were free to be Jews. But it had a downside because antisemites, for the first time in 70 years, were free to be antisemites. And antisemitism began to reappear in Russia at the end of the 80s. And one of our Rabbanim from Manchester was out in Moscow helping to rebuild Jewish life. And while he was there, a young girl came to see him, in her late teens, and she was shaking, and she told the Rabbi, "All my life, I never spoke about being Jewish, nobody thought I was Jewish, we didn't discuss it, and nobody said anything. Now, because I'm Jewish, when I go in the street, people shout at me, *евреў, еврей*, "Jew". What shall I do?"

And the Rabbi had a big beard and a big black hat and a long *kapota*. He turned to the young lady and said, "The way I look, people probably don't mistake me for an Episcopalian."

"And yet," he said, "in all these months I've been here, no one ever shouted out *евреў, еврей*. [Jew! Jew!] Why do you think that is?"

And the young lady thought for a bit and gave this answer, and it is so true. She said, "Because they know if they shout out the word 'Jew' at me, I will take that as an insult. But if they shout out the word 'Jew' to you, they know you will take that as a compliment."

³ Additional note: Joseph's "separateness" in Egypt may have been the key to the success of both his sons following in the path of Hashem

⁴ <https://www.rabbisacks.org/archive/haman-the-first-antisemite/>

If we want to fight antisemitism, let us walk tall and proud as Jews, and let us work with all humanity to banish hatred forever. Amen.

14) When someone recognizes you as a Jew, is that a compliment or an insult?

15) What can you do to show your Jewish pride?