

# JOSEPH AND DANIEL: COURT JEWS AND DREAMERS

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The term "Court Jew" per se is a European term. In Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Central Europe, there were several prominent *Hofjuden*, as they were known in German. Examples of Court Jews who were also patrons of Torah learning are: Samuel Oppenheimer (1635-1703), who served at the Austrian court of Emperor Leopold I, and whose library, bequeathed to his nephew David Oppenheimer, later chief rabbi of Prague, is now in the Bodleian Library of Oxford, and Behrend Lehmann (1661-1730), a fixture in the court of Augustus II of Saxony, who endowed the renowned *klaus* of Halberstadt. The most famous, or infamous, Court Jew, depending on one's perspective, was Joseph Süß Oppenheimer (1698-1738), at the court of Carl, Prince of Württemberg, whom Jew-haters reviled as *Jud Süß* [Jew Suss]. Though far from a pious Jew, he sanctified the Name with a martyr's death.

Though the relatively modern term "Court Jew" does not fit the three biblical characters Joseph, Mordecai and Daniel, to an extent, this typology is applicable to them in that, as strangers, they served with distinction and with no small amount of political savvy the monarchs who appointed them to their exalted positions.

As fascinating as are the parallels between Joseph and Mordecai, we are going to leave Mordecai to concentrate on Daniel. The reason for this decision is that Mordecai has no truck with dreams, neither his own nor other men's. And dreams will be our focus.

Let us compare Daniel to Joseph. Like Joseph, Daniel's ladder to success is a royal dream. In Daniel's case, the challenge is greater. King Nebuchadnezzar is not letting out the contents of the dream, so Daniel must not only interpret the dream but also reveal its contents! Despite that, Daniel never quite makes it to viceroy; he is kept *in the gate of the king* (Dan. 2:49). (By the way, that was Mordecai's position before his promotion to viceroy. See Esther 2:19.)

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Daniel parallels Joseph in many ways. Both were given new and non-Hebraic names by their employers; Joseph became Zaphenath-paneah (Gen. 41:45); Daniel became Beltshazzar (Dan. 1:7; 4:5). Both were ultimately deified by their respective non-Jewish societies.<sup>1</sup> Both used their rulers' dreams (or the outcome of those dreams) to benefit their Hebrew/Jewish countrymen.<sup>2</sup> Neither achieved prophecy per se, though they dreamt many dreams.<sup>3</sup>

We are not here to dwell on their parallels, but rather to sharpen the contrast between them. In the course of their lives, Joseph and Daniel undergo essential transformations – in opposite directions. Joseph makes his debut as a dreamer, a *ba'al ha-halomot* [master of dreams], as he is referred to mockingly by his brothers (Gen. 37:19). By the end of his career, he is no longer a dreamer, but an interpreter of dreams, or as Pharaoh put it, '*You understand a dream to interpret it*' (41:15). Joseph's progression is from dreamer to interpreter. Daniel's life seems to move in the opposite direction, from interpreter of dreams to visionary. Our task will be to discover the operative principle. Why are two men's careers, so alike in other ways, catapulted in opposite directions?

There is incredible naïveté in Joseph narrating to his brothers his dreams of grandeur. In one dream, his brothers' sheaves of grain bow down to his sheaf. In another, the sun and the moon and eleven stars (Joseph had eleven brothers) bow down to him. (Was Joseph the earth in a Ptolemaic, versus Copernican, conception of the universe?) One is reminded of a hasidic story. A rebbe dies leaving a son and a son-in-law. The hasidim pass over the son, choosing the son-in-law to succeed. Some months later, the son has a dream. His father, the deceased rebbe, appears to him, telling him to lead the flock. Startled from sleep, the son relates the dream to his wife. The shrewd woman sizes up the situation: "If your father would have appeared to the hasidim in their dreams, that would have been a different matter. Now that he appeared to you, you can go back to sleep."

These are the dreams of the 17-year old in his homeland. So concludes the first phase of Joseph's existence. Sold into bondage by envious brothers, he arrives in Egypt in bondage. Soon enough, he lands in prison. There he makes the acquaintance of two royal prisoners, Pharaoh's personal baker and butler. On a single night, both have disturbing dreams. Joseph encourages

them to tell him their dreams that he may interpret them. This is the onset of phase two of Joseph's career. The butler dreams he is bearing the cup of Pharaoh. The baker dreams he is carrying on his head breadbaskets containing loaves for Pharaoh's table, when a bird snatches them away. Joseph interprets the dreams to mean that the butler will be restored to his position, whereas the baker will be hanged. Joseph's predictions come true. The butler is reinstated, the baker is hanged.

Two years pass. According to the rabbis, it is now Rosh ha-Shanah, the New Year, when the fate of the world is decided.<sup>4</sup> The ruler of Egypt has bizarre dreams that adumbrate the economic welfare of the land of the Nile. Pharaoh dreams twice that night. In the first dream, lean cows devour fat cows; in the second, windblown sheaves consume well-endowed sheaves. Pharaoh is at a loss to make heads or tails of the dreams. Suddenly, the butler remembers how Joseph deciphered his dream and recommends him to Pharaoh. Joseph performs to Pharaoh's satisfaction and is appointed viceroy of Egypt.

How is that for a success story? Literally, from rags to riches. Does not anyone realize that lurking below the surface of this success story is a human tragedy? Joseph has gone from a very active dream life, from being a visionary, to armchair interpreter of other men's dreams. What does that say about what is happening in Joseph's interior?

You might counter with the observation that in order to interpret others' dreams, one must first be in touch with one's own dreams. In a sense, Joseph's adolescence is preparation for his later vocation. Joseph learns on himself. By being able to "read" his own dreams, he develops an ability to interpret the dreams of others. It is somewhat reminiscent of Freudian psychoanalysis. To train as an analyst, one must first undergo analysis; one starts as an analysand. Joseph first has his own dreams; thereby he gains insight into dreams in general, into dreamworks. That still does not explain why no further dreams of Joseph's are recorded in the Torah. Did not Freud dream? Where are the dreams of the mature Joseph?

Rav A.I.H. Kook writes that a dream is a direction in life.<sup>5</sup> In the subterrain of the soul, a direction is formed; it percolates to consciousness in the imagery of a dream. Put more radically, the soul scripts its own reality. Rav Kook quotes the Gaon of Vilna: "The deeds of a person are his heavens." Each of us creates his own heavens, his own horizons.

Joseph had a direction, he had dreams. Now he lives vicariously through others. At times, he may see his fate reflected in other people's dreams. The Rebbe of Izbica made the shocking suggestion that Joseph found in the saga of the baker and the butler answers to gnawing questions concerning his continuing conflict with his brother Judah.<sup>6</sup> The baker and butler are reflections of two old rivals, Joseph and Judah. It was Judah who was responsible for selling Joseph into slavery. Later there is a standoff between Joseph and Judah, which the Midrash portrays as a standoff between two kings. "*For, lo, the kings were assembled, they were wroth together* (Ps. 48:5). '*For, lo, the kings*'— This refers to Judah and Joseph."<sup>7</sup> In later Israelite history, the two kingdoms, southern and northern, will be known as the Kingdom of Judah and the Kingdom of Israel. The Kingdom of Israel is in fact the Kingdom of Joseph. Its founder, Jeroboam I, was a descendant of Joseph, from the tribe of Ephraim (I Kg. 11:26). I would bring support for the Izhbitser's contention that the butler is evocative of Judah: In the blessings of Jacob to his sons, the blessing of Judah abounds with images of viniculture (49:11-12).

Be that as it may, the dreams of the baker and butler are their own dreams. Joseph may see contained therein a message concerning his fraternal conflict, but that is not the simple meaning. Simply, they pertain to their own lives, not to Joseph's. Later, we have the dreams of Pharaoh, which do not concern Joseph personally. They pertain to the Egyptian economy. As the story unfolds, we see the fulfillment of the early dreams of Joseph. Indeed, his father and brothers do come down to Egypt to bow before him. That is the fulfillment of the old dream. Are there no new dreams?!

Let us turn to Daniel. Daniel is an observant Jew in the court of Nebuchadnezzar. He subsists on a diet of seeds and water (Dan. 1:12), pretty much what a bird would eat. Over the span of several years, he interprets two dreams of Nebuchadnezzar's (cf. the two dreams of Pharaoh), and also *the handwriting on the wall* for his successor Belshazzar. Then most abruptly, the text shifts to Daniel's own visions concerning the fate of the Jewish People. The most messianic of all biblical dreams are contained in the Book of Daniel. A cryptic date is given when the Messiah will finally appear (7:25). Those who puzzle over the Messiah's appearance inevitably turn to the Book of Daniel for guidance.

The point is, Daniel's spiritual evolution is the opposite of Joseph's. Joseph goes from being a dreamer to an interpreter of dreams; Daniel evolves from an interpreter of dreams to a dreamer. An anecdote will illustrate what I have in mind. It concerns a *hozer* of a hasidic rebbe. The *hozer* is the man who reviews the rebbe's discourse for the benefit of the hasidim. This particular *hozer* started out as a student of a *mitnagdic*, anti-hasidic yeshiva. After graduation, this individual joined the hasidic movement and, as he was very talented, worked his way up to being the *hozer* to the rebbe. Years later, the *hozer* met his former *rosh yeshiva*. The dean of the yeshiva asked him, "What do you do in life?" "I am the *hozer* to the rebbe." Responded the Lithuanian sage known for his wit, "If you would have stayed with us, "*volt ihr alein gekent zogen!* [You would have been able to say on your own!]" In other words, instead of interpreting what another man has said, you would have been able to hold forth on your own.

What is being presented to us, is Daniel's empowerment. He starts as an interpreter for Nebuchadnezzar, but by the middle of the book (Chapter 7 to be precise), he is "saying" or seeing for himself. He no longer has to behold reality through the eyes of another; he sees with his own eyes. He says for himself!

What is the operative principle here? Why do two lives move in opposite directions, transforming one man from dreamer into interpreter, while the other is transformed from interpreter into dreamer? There is a simple explanation: Joseph marks the beginning of *galut mizrayim* [Egyptian exile]. We are observing a Hebrew moving from sovereignty to servitude, from Canaan to Egypt. In his own land, the Hebrew is master of his own fate, of his own dreams. He is his own visionary, his own man. As Rav Kook explained, the dream is the direction the soul is taking in life. In his own land, Joseph has a direction in life; in exile, he is no longer able to chart a destiny of his own. He must live vicariously through other men's dreams and aspirations. Sometimes those dreams will have bearing on his innermost quest and questions, as the Izhbitser interpreted the interlude of the royal baker and butler. Other times, those dreams relate only tangentially to the Israelite world. Pharaoh's dreams concern primarily the general world.

Daniel, on the other hand, is coming out of *galut bavel* [Babylonian exile] arching toward *Eretz Yisrael* [the Land of Israel]. So the progression is the

opposite. When we first encounter him in captivity, he has no dreams of his own. He is merely an appendage to the body of Babylon, a functionary of Nebuchadnezzar's. His role is to interpret the Babylonian monarch's dreams; there is no indication he has any aspirations of his own. Daniel's situation might be summed up by the words of his contemporary Ezekiel, *And I was within the exile* (Ezek. 1:1). Rav Kook paraphrased, "The I within – of the individual and of the community – was in a state of alienation. . . . And since there is no 'I,' there is no 'he,' and *a fortiori* there is no 'you.'"<sup>8</sup>

Applying the Izhbitser's method, it is possible to project on another's dream one's own conflict. Perhaps Daniel was able to graft onto Nebuchadnezzar's second dream his own unresolved conflict. Perhaps, to an extent, he identified with the isolation and restricted diet of Nebuchadnezzar – the interpretation he gave to that dream.<sup>9</sup> Yet projection is no substitute for the act of dreaming.

By the end of the book, hope beckons; hope of redemption and deliverance from Babylonian captivity, and of *shivat tzion* [Return to Zion]. Daniel moves into the driver's seat. He is now an active visionary of Israel's redemption, of the Messiah. Instead of being a *hozer*, as in the hasidic anecdote, he can say on his own!

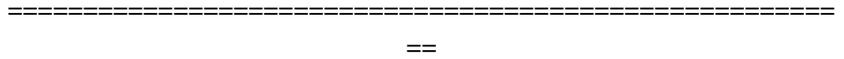
Bible critics who investigate the Book of Daniel are unable to discern the unity in the compilation. Before them lie two very different documents. The first (Chapters 1-6), is a collection of dream interpretations written in the third person, in Aramaic; the second (Chapters 7-12), is a collection of apocalyptic visions, written in the first person, in Hebrew.<sup>10</sup> They find tasteless the "stitching" connecting the two cycles. And as is their wont, they conveniently assign to the two radically dissimilar portions of Daniel widely divergent dates of composition, different provenances, different milieux. What escapes them, is the inner logic of *Anshei K'nesset ha-Gedolah* [Men of the Great Assembly] who, talmudic tradition tells us, were the editors or redactors of the Book of Daniel.<sup>11</sup> To use the terminology of the Midrash, these are not *divrei piyyutin*, no mere historical annals; the liberties taken with chronology are the signature of *ru'ah ha-Kodesh* [Divine inspiration].<sup>12</sup>

In the midst of exile, there was no *ani* [I] to speak in the first person; the vehicle of expression was perforce the language of exile, Aramaic. The Jew in exile speaks the master's tongue just as he sees through his master's eyes.

But the sentence of exile is ticking to a close. Daniel finds once again his tongue and his I/eye.

NOTES

1. See TB 'Avodah Zarah 43a concerning Joseph, and Sanhedrin 93a for Daniel.
2. See Rashi, Daniel 4:24; Avot de-Rabbi Nathan, Ch. 4.
3. The dreams of Joseph were not considered prophetic by the rabbis. See TB Berakhot 55. Whether Daniel was a prophet is the subject of heated debate among talmudic commentators. See Megillah 3a, Rashi and Sha'agat Aryeh there, and Rashi, Megillah 14a.
4. TB Rosh ha-Shanah 11; ibid. 16a.
5. Abraham Isaac Hakohen Kook, *Midbar Shur* (Jerusalem: Makhon RZYH Kook, 1999) p. 224.
6. See Mordecai Joseph Leiner, *Mei ha-Shilo'ah* (Vienna, 1860), beginning of *Vayyeshhev*.
7. Genesis Rabbah 93:2.
8. Kook, *Orot ha-Kodesh*, Vol. III (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1985) p. 140.
9. See Daniel 4:30 and TB Nazir 3a.
10. This is the general pattern. There are exceptions to the rule: Chapters 1-2:4 are in the third person and in Hebrew; Chapter 7 is in the first person and in Aramaic. These may be explained by the residual effect of language. Daniel, though having lost his "I" to use Rav Kook's term, is not converted to Aramaic until he becomes interpreter to Nebuchadnezzar. Likewise, after having discovered his I/eye, the reversion to native Hebrew is not immediate; the foreign Aramaic tongue lingers for a while.
11. TB Bava Batra 15a.
12. See Genesis Rabbah 85:2 and gloss there of the Rashash (Rabbi Samuel Strashun).



RESPONSES from Rabbi Hayyim Hal-  
pern's book **TORAH DIALOGUES**

- 1. It was observed before the Exodus.**
- 2. Leviticus 7:26 *You must not consume any blood either of bird or of animal* (Sefer HaHinuch No. 148).**
- 3. *Rise before the aged...* (v. 32)**