

MORASHAH
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Parashat HaShavuah Series

Parashat Miketz

Parashat Miketz and the festival of Chanukkah usually overlap. In fact, Miketz will not be separated from Chanukkah again until 2020! While this overlap is technically a coincidence, there is no denying an intriguing link between the content of this parashah and the core message of Chanukkah. Consider this thought from Rabbi Dr. Nahum Sarna (*Understanding Genesis*, p. 222):

“Attention must now be drawn to two tendencies that our narrative has very delicately opposed one against the other. On the one hand, the foreign origins of Joseph are constantly emphasized. The Egyptians with whom he comes in contact are always aware of them. Potiphar’s wife sneeringly calls him *a Hebrew* (39:14, 17), Joseph tells the cupbearer that he was kidnapped *from the land of the Hebrews* (40:15), the cupbearer describes Joseph to Pharaoh as *a Hebrew youth* (41:12); the Egyptians did not eat with Joseph because their particularistic religion forbade them to dine with Hebrews.

“Against this external counter-pressure to assimilation is opposed an inner drive towards Egyptianization on the part of Joseph. His outer garb, his changed name, his marriage to a daughter of the High Priest of Re, and his mastery of the Egyptian language were all calculated to make him outwardly indistinguishable from his fellow Egyptians, and although they could not accept Joseph whole-heartedly as their equal, he was yet, apparently, so thoroughly satisfied with his situation that he preferred not to be reminded of his past. He expresses this most clearly in the names he gives to his two sons (41:51-52). It is just when this point has been reached that Joseph’s brothers appear once again on the scene.”

In light of the above, it is hard to overlook the association between the parashah and the festival it overlaps. For Diaspora Jewry, the “two tendencies” of Joseph’s biography mirror the tension we experience at this season as we struggle to live in two worlds.

Contemporary observance of Chanukkah vividly illustrates the tension between “fitting in” and standing apart. Much of what Jews “observe” revolves around customs – giving of gifts, latkes, doughnuts and dreidels – far removed from the core message of Chanukkah. Might they not owe their prominence more to our need (often subconscious) to make ourselves “outwardly indistinguishable” from our non-Jewish neighbors in late December?

Chanukkah, however, reminds us that Joseph’s dilemma is our own. Chanukkah is

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less the story of external oppression than it is the story of internal Jewish debate on what it means to be truly Jewish. Some Jews were assimilationists (Hellenists), others brooked no compromise with Judaism as they defined it (the Hasidim). A third way – essential loyalty to all aspects of the covenant with an openness to general culture – was the Maccabean gift to World Jewry.

Or as UTJ affiliates, might put it, *emunah tzerufah v'yosher da'at* (genuine faith and intellectual honesty).

Chag Urim Samayach!

Shabbat Shalom!

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