

"RELIGION WITH A FUTURE"  
Joseph's Secret Treasure

Joseph has always been a natural target of much criticism, some of it quite bitter. Not only was he personally hated by his brothers, and envied by the Egyptian courtiers in Pharaoh's palace who begrudged him his meteoric rise to power, but the historic figure of Joseph and what it represents has also been subjected to serious animadversions.

Joseph is the prototype of the Jew who is, at one and the same time, loyal to his Jewishness and thoroughly conversant with the modern world. Joseph anticipated the modern Orthodox Jew, especially the modern American Orthodox Jew. Substitute the word "American" for the word "Egyptian" in the verbal picture of Joseph, and you have a succinct, composite image of today's Orthodox Jew --- his promises and dangers, hopes and fears, tensions and dreams, successes and failures.

Joseph was, first and foremost, a good Jew. The Bible tells of his exemplary moral self-control. The Rabbis maintain that he never defiled himself with what is forbidden to a Jew; he was demonstrative in his observance of Kashruth. Before his eyes at all times he kept the demut diyukno shel abba, the image of his old father's face, the ideals instilled in him by Jacob. His children were thoroughly Egyptianized, yet they spoke the Holy Tongue. He himself had an Egyptian name, Tzafnat Pa'aneiah, yet he never forgot his Hebrew name and identity. He was an ish matzliah, a worldly success, and at the same time he remained true to what had been taught to him in his father's home. If he was consumed by a burning ambition to outdo his forbears, as in his dream of his parents as well as his brothers bowing to him, he nevertheless understood his deep responsibility both to provide for and respect them. Joseph straddled two worlds -- that of Israel and its moral and religious heritage, and that of Egypt, with its technology and wealth and its promise of power. If Joseph's

character is sometimes paradoxical, it is because these two elements in his whole make-up, the Egyptian and the Hebrew, the modern and the Jewish, are not always completely compatible.

We modern American Orthodox Jews are, all of us, in one way or another, Josephs. We too are subject to tensions, to promises and dangers, because of the two worlds that we, by our very being, attempt to bridge: the world of traditional Judaism, loyal to Torah and Halakhah, and the contemporary culture and civilization of the West. As Joseph was criticized, so are we criticized ---- and the criticisms are not all captious and malicious. If we really believe that we are right, that G-d and Torah and history mean for us to live in both worlds and somehow try to unite them within us, that we ought not ever surrender our priceless Jewish heritage, nor ever relinquish our modernity, then we must be prepared to analyze, and ponder courageously some of these judgments by those outside our own circle.

The Talmud (end Pesahim) makes a comment upon Joseph that, in a deeper sense, represents the sum and substance of the situation and dilemma of us, his twentieth century disciples. Concerning the verse in today's Sidra, va-yelaket Yosef et kol ha-keseif ha-nimtza v'eretz Mitzrayim, that Joseph gathered up all the money in Egypt and gave it to Pharoah, the Talmud tells us the following about Joseph's fabulous wealth: that although he brought everything to the coffers of Pharoah, shalosh matmoniot hitmin Yosef be'mitzrayim, Joseph hid three treasures in Egypt. Two of them were ultimately discovered and taken by others. Ahat nitgaleh le'Korah, ve'ahat nitgaleh l'Antoninus -- one treasure was found by Korah, the vastly wealthy Levite who led the insurrection against Moses years later, and the second was taken by one plunderer after another, until it finally came into the possession of Antoninus, that rich and benevolent Roman Emperor, and friend of Rabbi Judah the Prince. The third treasure, however, is genuzah le'tzaddikim le'atid lavo, it is sequestered or hidden away for the pious in the future.

What our Rabbis intend is not only the tale of the disposition of Joseph's riches. They mean also to confirm two adverse criticisms, and yet to pronounce a third, final and favorable judgment on Joseph as such. And it is these criticisms and this approbation which ought to mellow our image of ourselves and, ultimately, befor us a source of great encouragement.

One accusation against Joseph is that his precious talent, his hard work, his general excellence, all utlimately benefited not his own people, but complete strangers. Joseph, the argument goes, was overly Egyptianized. What he could have and should have offered to his own brethren and own posterity he spent on an unappreciative and often undeserving non-Jewish world. The wealth of Joseph was of no use to the people of Israel. It was squandered on the Antoninuses of history who, whatever their personal inclinations, were not legitimately entitled to it.

Do not we American Jews recognize this attack? We have heard it time and again these past several years, from no less an eniment critic than Premier Ben Gurion. A Jew who opts for America can be called neither a Zionist nor truly Orthodox. If you are indeed a Torah Jew, you must emigrate to Israel forthwith, else you stand condemned of committing the benefit of your time and substance and loyalty to strangers instead of to your own people.

This

Now this represents a problem for us. ~~Now~~ is not the time ~~and here is not~~ OR the place to go into a complete discussion of the American Orthodox justification for not forthwith emigrating to Israel. Suffice it to say that we acknowledge the existence of a problem, but do not consider it devastating. Ultimately, what benefits Antoninus benefits Joseph and his descendants as well. In the world we live in today, mankind is interdependent as never before. What individual Jews have contributed to nuclear physics or to psychiatry or to medicine, knows no national or ethnic boundaries. The good that American Jews do for America redounds, in the long run, to the benefit of all humanity, Israel included. Yet the basic criticism stands: when you live in two worlds, you run the risk of relinquishing precious human treasures to others who may

remain, forever after, not only unappreciative but also hostile. Look at what happened to our greatest gift to the world: we gave it a religion, a Bible, a belief in G-d --- and they slaughtered us in the very name of that Bible and G-d and religion!

The second accusation is that Joseph's gifts may fall into the wrong hands -- those of a Korah. Our fellow Orthodox Jews who do not share our penchant for living in the modern world have accused us of being the very source of our own betrayal. It is from our modern yeshivot and day schools, they point out, that the leaders of the non-Orthodox groups ~~have been taken~~ <sup>come</sup>. And look at the spiritual damage they have inflicted! Some of the most vituperous and malicious maligners of Traditional Judaism were trained, some even ordained, by modern Orthodox schools. Where do the most knowledgeable members of the non-Orthodox Temples come from if not from Orthodox American Jewish homes? Joseph's wealth -- in Korah's possession!

Here too we must be honest and acknowledge that it is a fact, and a painful one, that our bitterest detractors have come from our own camp. In the words of ~~the~~ Isaiah, meharsayikh u-maharivayikh mimekh yetze'u, thy destroyers and those that have laid thee waste have come from thine own midst.

Yet while this is so agonizing a prospect, it is a necessary part of the price we must pay for the whole enterprise of proving that Torah is relevant to our times. "Nothing ventured, nothing gained" is a truism that applies to our case as well as to any other<sup>s</sup>. Our whole endeavor of demonstrating that Torah is not hopelessly out of date, that it has profound meaning for those who prefer to live in the twentieth century, is an adventure fraught with great dangers. We must accept and undertake this adventure with the foreknowledge that there may be losses, and that some of our most precious treasures may sometimes be lost to the Korahs rather than be placed at the service of the Moseses.

When the late Rav Kook, of blessed memory, once discussed this theme in a memorable address, he applied to it the verse from Isaiah, u-fahad ve'rahav

levavekh, "and <sup>the</sup> ~~they~~ heart shall tremble -- and be enlarged." Living in these two worlds, of Torah and the West, is an enterprise fraught with paḥad or danger: specifically, that the whole venture will be a failure, and that the treasures, human and Jewish, will turn into Korahs who will despise Torah. Yet this anxiety is more than balanced by the glorious prospect: that of ve'rahav levavekh, true largesse of heart, joy and exultation.

Both these charges made against Joseph and against ourselves, that of losing our most precious treasures to either the Antominuses or <sup>the</sup> ~~the~~ Korahs, are, however, outweighed by the marvelous promise contained in the Talmud's description of the third treasure buried by Joseph in ancient Egypt: genuzah le'tzaddikim l'atid la-vo. What a prophetic vindication of Joseph --- and of American Orthodoxy! --- lies in those words! Our fellow Orthodox Jews to the right, those who reject modernity with both hands, have accused us of lacking in a genuine piety. Modern Orthodoxy, they have declared, can never create tzaddikim, truly religious personalities. And at the same time, our detractors to the left of us have pronounced our obituary: Our whole spiritual enterprise is foredoomed, <sup>and</sup> Torah is hopelessly outmoded, <sup>^</sup> the Jewish tradition has no future, no atid.

We who follow the luminous example of Joseph deny both charges. It is our contention, and one on which we stake our faith and our fate, that the glorious combination is viable, possible, real, and vigorous: both tzaddikim and le'atid la-vo! Modern Orthodoxy, despite all its profound problems and well-advertised inadequacies, can successfully hold onto both worlds with firmness, integrity and dignity -- and retain both too! One can be truly pious, in the tradition of Halakhah and Torah, and still be oriented to the future. There is no unresolvable conflict between them. Those who would remove one from the other -- Torah from the hustle and bustle of modern life, or contemporary affairs from the judgment of Torah -- ~~both~~ offend the deepest tenets of our faith. If Torah has no relevance for 1963, then its claims are fraudulent and 35 centuries of Jewish history are a tragic failure. Torah withdrawn from all of contemporary life

into its own little cubicles, whether Meah She'arim or Squaretown or Williamsburg, threatens to become nothing more than a quaint museum piece revered by a few eccentric sectarians, no matter how genuine their loyalties to Torah. And, far worse, modern life unblessed by Torah, undirected by Halakhah, unjudged by Mussar, has already shown that it becomes a jungle, and its inhabitants -- beasts and cannibals.

This successful combination to which we are committed, that of tzaddikim and le'atid la-vo, may not always be apparent. Unlike our weak points, the loss of our gifts to Antoninus and Korah, our unique virtue is not nitgaleh, not always obvious. On the contrary, it is generally genuzah, concealed, hidden, <sup>searching</sup> obscured from the/eyes of the uninitiated. Despite all the apparant <sup>e</sup> losses and attrition, we are here to tell the tale. It is a difficult, hard, dangerous -- but glorious -- fate in which we are engaged: to fuse two worlds often reluctant even to meet with each other. But its triumphs and treasures outweigh all others. This whole enterprise, while certainly not American in origin, is yet a relatively new one, and we American Orthodox Jews are committed to it on a scale unlike any Jewry before us. Ours is a historic mission. The validity of Torah as a meaningful way of life is in balance. We must march onward confident that genuzah, hidden within us, our hearts and minds, are the seeds of the success of our faith: that of creating tzaddikim le'atid la-vo. To our forbears there will come the report, as there came to Father Jacob, ode Yosef hie, Joseph lives yet --- the same Joseph, ~~the~~ Yosef ha-tzaddik, despite all his modern trappings and worldly accoutrements, despite ve'khi hu moshel be'khol eretz Mitzrayim, that he has mastered all contemporary culture and life. And although it is inevitable that there be skeptics who do not believe the experiment can succeed, even as we are told of Jacob that va-yafag libo ki lo he'emin lahem, his yeart pounded because he did not believe them, yet ultimately -- again as with Father Jacob --- va-tehi ruah Yaakov avihem, the spirit of their father Jacob was revived.

The doubts, the <sup>en</sup> ~~tres~~ sions, the anxieties, the skepticism about our venture, our



attempt to bridge the two great worlds --- these are to be expected,  
But in the end we shall triumph. Orthodoxy will emerge not as an irrelevant  
anachronism, nor as a diluted and compromised ersatz-Judaism. It will triumph  
precisely because it knows the burning passion, the consuming ambition of a  
Joseph to lay away a hidden treasure of tzaddikim le'atid lavo. Our success  
will, with the help of G-d, ensure the revival of Judaism throughout the  
world. The spirit of Jacob will be raised again if we will act with faith  
and conviction and steadfastness.

Then the gifts to Antoninus will have been worthwhile, and the Korahs themselves  
will have proclaimed, as did Korah of old, Mosheh emet ve'torato emet, Moses is  
true and his Torah is true.