

Congregation Sons of Israel

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Upcoming Events

"**Sumptuous Seasonings**" has arrived! A copy of our shul's cookbook is displayed in our lobby under our virtual yahrzeit panel. You may pick up your orders during office hours. Extra copies are available. Cost: \$20

★
Our Misheberach List has become quite lengthy, and we believe there are names that can be removed. If you had submitted any names and wish for them to remain on the list, please notify our office by January 2nd.

★
New Membership Directory:

—If you would like your cell, fax or email address listed in our next membership directory, or have changes to make on your listing, please call or email the synagogue office (april2715@gmail.com) by January 6th.

—If you would like to advertise your business in the back of our directory, please send in your business card by January 6th. The cost is \$36.00.

★
The spring semester of our **Torah Lishma Club**, a program for 2nd—8th graders meeting Sunday mornings at 8:30 a.m., begins Sunday January 8th. The cost for the spring semester is \$100 per child. Please register your child with payment by January 8th.

★
The Jewish Day School invites you to "An Evening With Bill Cosby", honoring Karen & Peter Cooper, Saturday evening, February 4th, at 7:30 p.m., at the Zoellner Arts Center in Bethlehem. Tickets are available online at: www.tinyurl.com/JDSMainEvent.

★
JACS will meet tomorrow evening at 7:30 p.m.

Regular Classes

Daily
Daf Yomi Sunday—Friday 7:30 AM

Tuesdays
In-Depth Gemara Class with Rabbi Wilensky 7:00 PM

"Wednesdays"
"The Book of Ezra" with Judy Slyper 7:00 PM

Shabbos
Beginner's Gemara with Dr. Henry Grossbard 8:00 AM
Parsha Class with R' Wilensky 12 noon
Daf Yomi 1 hr. prior to Mincha



קה"ל בני ישראל
Congregation Sons of Israel

Parshat Miketz
28 Kislev 5772
December 24, 2011

Announcements

Our 8th Annual Chulent Cookoff will be held after services. Contestants are: Judy D'ver, Kara Kastan, Bob Levin-Dando, Benny & Galit Minster, Judy Slyper and Rabbi Wilensky.

Kiddush presented by Moshe & Lisa Markowitz in honor of a Happy Chanukah.

Shabbos Schedule

8:00 AM Beginner's Gemara Class
9:00 AM Shacharis
10:20 AM Jr. Congregation
12 Noon Parsha Class

3:05 PM Daf Yomi
4:05 PM Mincha, Shalosh Se'udos
5:22 PM Shabbat concludes

Minyanim—December 25-31

	Chanukah Sunday 12/25	Chanukah Monday 12/26	Chanukah Tuesday 12/27	Chanukah Wed 12/28	Thursday 12/29	Friday 12/30	Shabbos 12/31
AM	8:30 AM	Rosh Chodesh 8:30 AM	Rosh Chodesh 6:30 AM	6:30 AM	6:30 AM	6:45 AM	9:00 AM
PM	4:20 PM	4:20 PM	4:20 PM	4:20 PM	4:20 PM	4:25 PM	4:15 PM

Miketz

Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb

Sadist, or Therapist?

Once again, my three eager disciples were already seated when I entered the room and were engaged in a raucous discussion.

"He is a sadist! He is motivated by revenge, and I don't see why we think of Joseph as a model for our behavior."

If you've been following these columns for the past several weeks, you know that it is Richard who is talking. He is the most opinionated and most expressive of the three young men who signed up for my course on "Basic Jewish Concepts in the Book of Genesis."

The assigned readings included this week's entire Torah portion, Parshat Miketz, (Genesis 41:1-44:17 which continued the Joseph story, beginning with Joseph still imprisoned, continuing with his rapid rise to power, and concluding with his dramatic encounter with his brothers.

Richard, Leon, and Simon were captivated, but perplexed, by Joseph's behavior. For starters, "... He made himself strange unto them, and spoke roughly with them..." (Ibid., 42:7)

Leon, who usually has some unique insight in the back of his mind, oddly echoed Richard's frustration this time: "He begins by speaking roughly with them," he exclaimed, "but then goes on to make matters worse. He accuses them of espionage and refuses to listen to their explanation of their suspicious behavior."

Simon, again struggling to overcome his characteristically bashful self, entered the

fray: "What really upsets me is that Joseph is not just cruel to his brothers. I could understand why he would do that, if only for revenge. But by insisting that they bring Benjamin, the youngest, down to Egypt, he is torturing his beloved father Jacob as well. Why would he do that?"

"And to imprison Simon", thundered Richard. "That's the last straw!"

Simon, that is, our Simon, expressed his thanks to Richard for defending the biblical figure whose name he carried.

"Rabbi," concluded Leon, "you have got to help us out here. We are searching for some admirable Jewish concepts, but, frankly, Joseph's behavior is hardly a model for how a good Jew should conduct himself."

Then, Leon went on to add a different sort of question entirely: "It has struck me," he said probingly, "that you and all Jews who attend synagogue weekly have been reading this story year in and year out for decades. To us, reading it for the first time, it is exciting literature. But reading it as often as you have must make the material quite boring. Can you speak to that?"

Simon, who was not only getting over his diffidence but who was becoming rivalrous with Leon, added: "I must say that this is not the first time I read the Joseph story. I read Thomas Mann's novel, *Joseph and His Brothers*, and loved it. But this is the first time I am reading the scriptural version. But you, Rabbi Weinreb, have read this version dozens of times in your life. Isn't it monotonous?"

I pondered the proceedings for what must have seemed like an eternity. I really wanted to get the answer right. This is what I found myself saying:

"The Jew who reads the Torah portion every week does indeed confront a challenge. He has to find a new and deeper meaning in the text each year. He certainly cannot allow the understanding of the biblical narrative that he had as an adolescent, for example, to remain the way he understands it when he is more mature.

"What I find helpful in my own personal study is to consult a different commentary each year so that I am assured that I will gain new perspectives on the old stories.

"You would be amazed, and that could be the subject of another course, of the great variety of interpretations given to the stories of the Torah even just within the circle of traditional commentaries. I guess, though, that you would not be amazed by the fact that your questions about Joseph's behavior have been asked for thousands of years and that numerous explanations are given.

"Let me share with you the perspective of one of those commentaries. I refer to the commentary of Rabbi Don Isaac Abarbanel, who, you won't believe this, was the minister of finance for King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella of Spain, and who probably knew Christopher Columbus firsthand.

"This Rabbi, known in traditional circles as 'the Abarbanel,' has this to say about your concern. I paraphrase his insight:

"Joseph was attempting to have his brothers experience for themselves the tribulations that he went through. He wanted to give them, and here I use jargon from my other field of interest, clinical psychology, the opportunity to have a 'corrective emotional experience.' That is, he was convinced that if they would experience a taste of what his experiences had been, they would come to regret their own behavior. They would gain empathy for him, their victim, by reliving themselves what they inflicted upon him.

"Thus, just as they once despised him and could not speak to him peacefully, so too, he pretended to be a stranger to them.

"Just as they accused him of being a tale bearer to their father, so too, he accused them of being tale-bearing spies.

"Just as they threw him into a pit, so too, he had one of them, Simon, thrown into prison.

"And just as their father's world had been shattered by Joseph's disappearance, so too, he caused them to tremble at the thought of causing suffering to their father."

I concluded: "Joseph dished out some very harsh medicine. But note that again and again, Joseph weeps in private. In Genesis 42:24, he 'turned himself from them and wept' and in 43:30 '...he sought where to weep; and he entered into his chamber, and wept there.' This proves to me that he was not merely acting vengefully, but, if I may resort to my psychology vernacular, he acted therapeutically."

We had reached the conclusion of the class hour. And we all realized that we had not yet identified any simple basic Jewish concepts. Luckily, Richard, having started the discussion, chose to conclude it as well:

"I guess we learned several basic Jewish concepts today. One is not to judge another by his or her superficial behavior. They may have profound motives of which we are ignorant. We also learned the importance of asking questions of a teacher, not assuming that we know it all. And finally, we learned the value of continuous Torah study. Wouldn't you agree that those are some essential basic Jewish concepts?"

Leon and Simon nodded their consent. I could hardly contain my applause.