



DREAMS & DREAMERS

The story in this week's Torah reading (B'reishit 37:5-9) is largely about dreams.

Yosef has dreams about leadership and status. The brothers recognise Yosef's authority and pay homage to him. The dream actually came true when Yosef was a high official in Egypt and his brothers gave him obeisance.

Go to next week's reading and we find this time that it is Pharaoh who is the dreamer. His dreams are about cows and corn.

The difference between Yosef and Pharaoh is in the theme of their respective dreams. Yosef's dreams are about where a person fits in the order of the universe.

What Pharaoh dreams about is not the world, about the structure of society and indeed about how God wants things to be, but about what he will eat and what he will possess.

SIMILAR VERBS

The Bible has similar verbs for sit/dwell (YASHAV) and turn/return (SHUV).

At the beginning of this week's Torah reading the verb YUD-SHIN-VET denotes to dwell, but when we come to the Psalms the two options are both there and the commentators sometimes get confused.

Take for example the beginning of Psalm 126, the famous SHIR HAMA-'ALOT. It says B'SHUV HASHEM, which denotes "When the Lord overturned the exile of Zion"... and look at Psalm 23:6, V'SHAVTI B'VEIT HASHEM ("I shall dwell in the House of the Lord"). Some choose to translate this latter phrase "I shall turn to the House of the Lord".

The likelihood is that the apparent ambivalence is deliberate and the poet is well aware of what he is doing.

THE PIT WAS EMPTY

One of the problems we find in the wording of the sidra is the verse which says that Yosef was thrown into a pit.

The verse reads, "The pit was empty - there was no water in it" (37:24). If there was no water in a pit, the pit was obviously empty. But wait. If there was no water there could be something else, and that is what the commentators tell us: The Talmud Shabbat 22a says, "There was no water there but there were serpents and scorpions".

It recalls the detective story about Father Brown. The story says, "No-one was there." In the ordinary course of events the regular things were happening. The postman would come, the gas man, the street sweeper. Because we are used to their presence we don't notice them and we think no-one was there.

In the end we discover that emptiness is only relative. **OZ**

THE MIRACLE OF CHANUKA

Chanuka is colourful, exciting and popular, ranking with Purim in carnival spirit. Every type of talent is part of the festival: art, music, drama, cookery. The games are absorbing.

The songs centre on Ma'oz Tzur, with the debate as to whether the final stanza is authentic. There are many attempts to modernise the song with a new verse about the Holocaust and Israel.

The lights are lit, with the proponents of oil-lights ranged against those who prefer candles. The chanukiyot come in a plethora of shapes. Some are elegant works of art; in the Bayswater Synagogue in London we had a dazzling display ranging from a chanukiya carved out of a potato, another made of bullet shells, a third built out of toy chairs. In the Hampstead Shule, our grand chanukiya was pressed into service one winter when we had an electricity blackout and the shule had no lights.

It wouldn't do for a yom-tov to be without heroes and villains. There also must be miracles, but which miracles?

The Talmud asks in tractate Shabbat, "What is Chanuka" (i.e. what is its

main essence?) There are different approaches in tractates Yoma and Shabbat. Yoma gives a nationalistic answer, highlighting the conclusion of the brilliant military campaign led by Yehuda the Maccabee against the Syrian Greeks.

Tractate Shabbat gives a spiritual, not a nationalistic explanation: "When the Hasmoneans became strong and overcame the enemy, they searched and could only find one flask of oil with the seal of the Kohen Gadol. It only contained enough oil for one day. A miracle occurred, and they lit the Menorah with it for eight days."

If the miracle was spiritual, why did the oil keep burning for eight days? These are some of the theories:

- Getting a fresh supply of oil took four days' journey from Jerusalem, plus four days to return.

- The experts able to produce fresh oil had become ritually impure and had to wait for the defilement to end. They could then prepare the fresh oil on the eighth day.

- Seven days were needed to rebuild the altar and the sacred vessels of the sanctuary. Only then could the seventh day be devoted to preparing fresh oil.

- There were actually two miracles. One is the discovery of the one-day supply of oil; the second is the continuation of the day's supply for a further week.

Rav Soloveitchik sees the festival as serving another purpose, the rededication of the Altar.

If the main thing is the miracle of the oil, why do the Torah readings mark the dedication of the Altar by the tribal princes? If the main thing is the oil for the Menorah, we would read about the construction of the Menorah. The texts imply that the oil-miracle was merely a stage in the rededication.

Rav Soloveitchik's approach, like the story of the flask of oil, exemplifies the rabbinic insistence that there was a battle for the soul of the Jew. When challenges arise, what should a Jew think and feel, how does a Jew express Jewish identity?

The Jewish spiritual and cultural tradition must be preserved. If we focus on battles and not blessings, on fighting and not faith, a crucial dimension is missing. [OZ](#)