

VaYeshev 2017

Delivered by Rabbi Aaron Krupnick 12/9/17

This Shabbos, I think of two dreamers; two men whose dreams motivated and underscored everything that they achieved in their lifetimes. Today I think of Joseph the son of Jacob, and Theodor Herzl, the father of modern Zionism. This Shabbos, I'd like to speak about both.

Unlike Joseph, Herzl did not live to see most of his dreams become reality. He dreamed of Jerusalem as the capital of a Jewish country where Jews could practice their religion freely and chart their own destiny. But Herzl died young; he was on 44 years old when he died in 1904. He did get to visit it, but not as the capital of the Jewish State. Like Joseph of the Torah, the only way he got to Israel permanently was for burial. Both had to have their bones transported long after their deaths. Herzl also took a lot of flak for his dreams, just like Joseph. Herzl's vision of a Jewish state was greeted with derision from liberal Jews, who rejected his separatist vision, and from the Orthodox, who believed the establishment of Jewish sovereignty in the holy land needed to await the coming of the Messiah. But he did not let up on his dream and today we have a Jewish country because of his vision that ignited a world-wide movement.

The events of this week need to be understood against the backdrop of Herzl the dreamer. This week, for the first time, under the leadership of President Trump, the United States formally recognized Jerusalem as Israel's capital city. Israel, of course, has called Jerusalem its capital from the founding of the State. But until this week Jerusalem was the only capital city that I know of in the entire world that the United States neither recognized nor chose as the location of its embassy. The decision to acknowledge Jerusalem as Israel's capital does not preclude further discussions about borders or the goals of a two state solution. What it does do is right a historical wrong. The idea of having the United States Embassy relocated to Jerusalem was written into law 22 years ago. Twenty two years! The Jerusalem Embassy Act of 1995 passed in Congress overwhelmingly the year after I came to Beth El; it wasn't even close. The Senate approved it 93-5, and the house 374 for with only 37 against. And both the Republican and Democratic party platforms have also consistently and explicitly acknowledged Jerusalem as Israel's capital for decades. This week a historical wrong was corrected.

Still, there is much to be learned from our Torah about what happened this week as well. So let's think for a moment about that other dreamer, Joseph. Joseph's dreams shaped his destiny, but not everyone, even those closest to him agreed with him, or even wanted to listen to what he had to say. There was pushback. He got thrown into a pit. Could there have been a better way for him to share his dreams with his brothers? Could he have done it in a way that did not antagonize them? Probably. And the United States and Israel do in fact need to be aware of how the rest of the world views us. It is not irrelevant. But at the same time, world opinion cannot derail the dreams we have lived for and worked towards for thousands of years.

But it is also interesting to note, as my wife Helene emphasized to me, that Joseph never despairs. He encounters friction, attacks, and serious setbacks at pretty much every stage of his life but he never "shry's gevalt." Joseph is not a Jonah, who laments that he was chosen to move the Jewish vision forward, to save lives and to shape destiny. Joseph is driven by an inner voice, the voice of Gd. He does not ever really know how his own story will play out, but he knows what is right, and he keeps pressing forward. I think that all lovers of Israel need to keep this in mind. When the United States follows through on legislation that we passed into law 22 years

ago we are doing what is right, even when it leads to protests, both peaceful and violent. And those of us, myself included, who are conflict adverse, people like me who want everyone to be happy all the time tend to "shry gevalt" when we disappoint people who want to have us simply do what they want of us. This is one of those situations that will inevitably lead to conflict. This is one of those situations where not everyone can be happy. But in the end, remember, Joseph is heroic precisely because he does not give up on his dreams, even in the face of opposition.

Finally, there is the spiritual element in this as well. How many of us have had dreams that we gave up on? How many of us have dreams at this very moment that might come true if we have the courage to follow through on them? Sometimes we cannot wait for all the pieces to fall into place. Sometimes destiny pops up before us; a door opens, unexpected decisions are made, and we have our chance to push on ahead. I think that this is one such moment in Jewish history, and I think that some of us will have such moments in our own lives as well. My prayer is that we have the courage to follow through on our convictions and work towards making our dreams come true.