**Šta snovi zapravo znače: proročanstvo, besmislica ili nijedno**

Rabbi Fohrman: Today's talk is an epilogue of sorts. I'm going to actually review some material that some of you might be familiar with from talks that I've done on Joseph. I'm actually going to be talking about the Joseph parshiyot today. But it's an epilogue to the Cherub secret which we talked about; our four‑part series that we did right here at the Young Israel and live screening, about a month or two ago.

This material is new. Actually, I did a version of this with my Monday morning group this past Monday, so if you were in my Monday morning group, apologies, because you're going to get a review here.

This is new and it really is just a week old, but it's exciting and I wanted to share it with you. Again, what I'm devoting this series to, is implications of what it was that we were talking about last month, Cherub secret. We were talking about Creation issues and the Creation and the Tabernacle. The construction of the Tabernacle and the construction of the world and the relationship between those two. So tonight, and hopefully next week, we're going to be talking about some implications of what it is that we've been talking about.

So let me open up and I guess, we'll get to the implications in a moment, as part of what it is that we'll be talking about here. But let me open up with this question. How is it that we are supposed to ‑‑ I guess it's a question for today but it's a question in general ‑‑ how is it that we're supposed to understand dreams? Are dreams prophetic? Are dreams nonsense? Or are dreams neither? If so, what is meant by neither? In particular how does the Torah treat dreams?

I want to talk to you about this in the context of Joseph's dreams. Now, Joseph's dreams may not be the same as our dreams because Joseph lived in a prophetic age, so his dreams may be somewhat more prophetic than ours, but perhaps they have some guidance in our own dreams. Of course, the great story of Joseph begins with him having these dreams and the dreams get him thrown in the pit and nobody's very happy about them. One of the great mysteries is what do those dreams mean? What do they actually mean?

You can divide that question up into two parts. One way to divide it up is to say, what is it that Joseph and Jacob think and the brothers; what is it that they think the dreams mean? The next question is, are they right about what they think the dreams mean? Do we, as readers, know what the dreams mean and can we figure it out?

What's strange is that just the mere fact that Joseph is told something, seemingly by way of a dream and we, the reader, don't exactly know what is being told and Joseph doesn't know what he's being told. The Torah just leaves it as a sort of question mark, is in itself strange.

In other words, if God meant to deliver a message to Joseph that was important for Joseph to know, so it's not like God has never done that before in the book of Genesis. Right? The book of Genesis is full of that. God speaks to Abraham all the time. God speaks to Jacob all the time. God speaks to Adam. God speaks to Noah. So it's not like God doesn't know how to speak to people and convey some sort of message that they get.

Suddenly, with Joseph, it almost seems like there's some sort of intention. What is this, like intentional ambiguity? If it's nothing, just let it be nothing. If it's nothing, like, why are You even telling it to us? Are You telling it to us because there was this nothing thing that happened and the only significance of the dreams were that they got Joseph thrown in the pit? Is that what we're supposed to understand here?

So the question is, it seems like the dreams are in this, sort of, middle place. This kind of never‑never land, between, you know, prophecy and insignificance and it's a strange kind of never‑never land. So what is it that we make of it?

So again, let's hone in on the following question. Let's think of these two questions, sort of, what I call the subject of question and the object of question. Subject of question is what does Joseph and the family think the dreams mean? Are they right and do we know differently as to what these dreams actually mean?

Okay. So what the family think the dreams mean is pretty clear. Let me just throw this out to you. Joseph has these two dreams, let's just remember what they are. Dream Number 1, we were all in the fields, there were these sheaves of wheat and the brothers' sheaves were bowing down to my sheaves. Dream Number 2, the sun and the moon and the 11 stars, they're all bowing to me. What do the brothers think it means? What does Jacob think it means? Anybody?

Audience Member: The brothers think it means that he dreamed that they'll bow down to him.

Rabbi Fohrman: The brothers think it means that Joseph thinks that he is superior, that he is the leader, that he's going to be king. Which is exactly what the brothers say. The brothers when they're upset about this they say ‑‑ well, Jacob thinks so as well. So we remember the first dream is told by Joseph to the brothers. The second dream is told by Joseph to the brothers and father. Each time there's a negative reaction. The brothers come and say "hamaloch timloch aleinu im mashol timshol banu," will you really rule over us? Is that what this is all about? Essentially Jacob's reaction is the same.

Also, we might say, okay, that's what the brothers think. What does Joseph think? Is there any indication as to what Joseph thinks? Whether or not Joseph, sort of, agrees with the brothers' interpretation of the dream, that he thinks that it's going to be him? Yeah?

Audience Member: Joseph obviously feels that these dreams are a message, because when he went down to Egypt, he didn't come back to stand before his father. This was totally against his philosophy.

Rabbi Fohrman: Okay. So one of the questions which maybe we'll deal with a little bit later, is why Joseph never sends a postcard home? Interesting question. Hi, Dad, in Egypt, loving it here, wish you were here. Just letting you know. Something or other. If he really loves his father, that would be a nice thing to do.

I'm not sure that the dreams explain why, but it seems like Joseph, kind of, agrees with that interpretation of the dream, because for example why do you think he tells dream Number 1 to the brothers and dream Number 2 to brothers and father? What gets added to dream number two? Audience Member: The moon.

Rabbi Fohrman: The sun and the moon. So the sun and the moon and 11 stars, Jacob thinks it means something and presumably Joseph thinks it means the same thing because otherwise why are you telling it specifically to father? What does Jacob think it means? The sun and the moon and the 11 stars. So that's a dead giveaway. The 11 stars are going to be who?

Audience Member: Jacob's son.

Rabbi Fohrman: His 11 brothers. The sun and the moon, therefore, are going to be father and mother. Why am I telling you this? Because in my first dream was this dream about the brothers, the brothers' sheaves are going to be bowing down to me. Now, I have a dream about father and mother also, so I'm going to tell it to father. So I tell it to Jacob. Jacob's response is exactly that. "Havo navo ani v'imcha v'achecha l'hishtachavot lecha artzah?" Is that what this is about? Me and mom, were all going to come bowing to you?

Now, Rashi deals with the problem that Mom is not alive. Let's just kind of leave this as a problem for now, but that seems to be the baseline interpretation of the dreams. Which is that these dreams seem to suggest that Joseph is ruling, is the leader of the family and that doesn't strike anybody as particularly happy.

Even Jacob who, kind of, thinks that that's the way things should be or at least has been treating Joseph as a quasi leader over the family, doesn't think it should be so public and therefore we have this language, "v'aviv shamar et hadavar," father tries to keep a lid over the things. For at least publicities purposes, he makes a show of getting angry at Joseph, "vayigar bo aviv," "v'aviv shamar et hadavar," he was angry with him and he, kind of, put a lid on it.

So this, at least, is the interpretation which everybody in the family seems to have. The question is, is that interpretation correct. Now, think back to our Creation discussion. The sun and the moon and the stars are all things that are created on the fourth day of Creation. Now, if you go back to the fourth day of Creation here's the intriguing thing that you'll find. Look at the creation of the sun and the moon and the 11 stars. Let me see if I can find it for you here.

"Vaya'as Elokim et shnei hame'orot hagdolim, et hama'or hagadol l'memshelet hayom v'et hama'or hakatan l'memshelet halailah v'et hakochavim. Vayiten otam Elokim b'rekia hashamayim l'ha'ir al ha'aretz, v'limshol bayom u'valailah."

Look at the verb which is being used over and over again, with reference to the sun and the moon and the stars. Reigning, ruling over. The whole purpose of the sun and the moon is to rule, the sun and the moon rule over day and night. "Limshol bayom u'valailah," "l'memshelet ha'lailah."

Is that a coincidence that here Joseph is having these dreams, dreams about the sun and the moon and the stars and it just so happens that the way he's castigated by the brothers for this dream is with this exact language which shows up with the sun and the moon and the stars, back in the original creation. That exact same verb which is, the sun and the moon and the stars are all about rulership. In fact, there's a kind of inversion going on because in the fourth day of Creation, who rules?

Audience Member: The sun and the moon.

Rabbi Fohrman: The sun and the moon rule over the day and night. In this case what are the sun and the moon doing? They're bowing to Joseph, in which case the brothers are saying, hamashol timshol banu? In other words, this is a terrible inversion of the way things are supposed to be. The sun and the moon are supposed to be in charge and you're saying the sun and the moon together with all these 11 stars are all bowing to you. That's not the way it's supposed to be.

So it struck me that that's probably not coincidental. The use of the word rule to describe the brothers' reaction to the dream and the fact that the sun and the moon and the stars happen to be the objects of one of these dreams where the Torah itself uses the word rule.

Can we agree that that's probably not a coincidence? But agreeing that it's probably not a coincidence is a long way from understanding what we make of that. Like, who cares? Why does the Torah do that and how does this add any nuance to our understanding of what's going on? So that really is what I want to talk to you tonight, the meaning of that one small little insight, that small little observation. That rule gets used, seems to be this connecting point between the creation of the sun and the moon and the stars, the way they are characterized and their appearance in these dreams.

Now, at the time, my daughter, I think it was Avigail, when I brought this up at the Shabbat table, last Shabbat, had a question. Which seemed, at face value, to take the air out of the significance of this whole observation. Okay. Here was her question. She said, you know, the parallel that you're making doesn't really fit and here's why.

When does the word rule appear with reference to the dreams? Does it appear with reference to the first dream or the second dream? The answer is the first. That's the brothers' response to the first dream, "hamaloch timloch aleinu, im mashol timshol banu?" It never appears in Jacobs's response to the second dream. Jacob's response to the second dream is just, "havo navo ani v'imcha v'achecha l'hishtachavot lecha artzah." So this connection, if it's there, is going to be a connection between the brothers' response to the first dream and Bereishit. But the problem is, what were the objects in the first dream?

Audience Member: The wheat.

Rabbi Fohrman: The wheat, not the stars. So Abba, your observation is kind of ridiculous. That's a good point, but enquiring minds want to know, it's close enough that it still doesn't seem coincidental. It seems like the Torah's, kind of, setting you up for this and it's like, I don't know, like something's off. It still doesn't seem coincidental, but at least right before the sun and the moon and the stars show up, the last thing you hear about is this verb that appears with the sun and the moon and the stars, which is precisely the issue that they're discussing, which is rulership.

Why skew it like that? It would be so perfect if it was a response to the second dream. Why is it a response to the first dream which has nothing to do with the sun and the moon and the stars?

Okay. So these are the background issues which we're going to get back to in a few minutes. Before we do that, I want to reprise one of my favorite talks with you, which is a talk that some of you may know, because since it's my favorite I tend to talk about it a lot.

It is the talk that I've given before about how Joseph interpreted Pharaoh's dream. If you've heard that talk before, you can just raise your hands so that I've some idea, how Joseph interpreted Pharaoh's dream. So you guys have, three, four, five. Okay. Not so many of you. Okay. So a few of you have. What I'm going to do, I'm actually going to go through this quickly because some of you have heard this.

Audience Member: I have a question.

Rabbi Fohrman: Oh, I'm not up to questions yet, so hold on.

So I'm going to go through this quickly because some of you have heard it, so keep your hats on. I'll try to be as clear as possible, but I want to set the table for this issue, which is how do we deal with the significance of dreams and how do we deal with this sort of vexing observation about the connection between the creation of the sun and the moon and the stars and the use of those verbs and those imagery within the dreams where it doesn't quite seem to fit. Okay.

All right. So now, off to Joseph and Pharaoh's dreams. We're now going to shift focus to how a different set of dreams which is Pharaoh's dreams in Parashat Miketz. Pharaoh has dreams and Joseph is called upon to interpret them and Joseph interprets the dreams successfully. The talk that I gave now, that I'm going to reprise, is basically an exploration into the mechanism by which Joseph might have successfully interpreted the dreams. How did Joseph successfully interpret those dreams?

So you might just say well it was prophecy, right? God came and told him the interpretation of the dreams. Indeed, Joseph himself says to Pharaoh, right before he interprets the dreams, "biladai, Elokim ya'aneh et shelom Pharaoh," it's not really going to be me interpreting them, it's going to be God.

The problem is that generally speaking in the book of Genesis, the book of Bereshit, when a prophetic moment happens you hear about it. It says that God spoke to Abraham and said this. God said to Jacob and said this. You usually don't get prophetic moments that you don't hear about it. You don't have a prophecy that the text is counting on you understanding, without actually telling you what the prophecy was, which would be kind of this case.

It never says in the text that and then God came to Joseph and said here is what the dream meant. The only thing that you have is Pharaoh goes and tells the dream to Joseph and the next thing that happens is Joseph, without even blinking an eyelash, just goes and interprets the dreams, as if he just knows what it means.

So the question is how did that exactly work? It almost seems like a non‑prophetic communication between God and Joseph. So here's the game I want to play. If the Torah tells us everything we need to know ‑‑ there's no missing information in the Torah. It's not like the Torah forgot to tell us the part, where God said, hey Joseph here is what the dream means.

If we have all the information, which is the only thing that happened was, that Pharaoh told him the dream, Joseph said it's not going to be me, it's going to be God. Then Joseph goes and interprets the dream without God whispering into Joseph's ear, so how did that work? How did Joseph know that?

So I think if you look carefully, you're going to actually see the mechanism by which Joseph knew it. Joseph figured it out. Now, he didn't figure it out because he was such a smart guy. He figured out what God was telling, because God was telling it to him, but God was telling it to him without telling it to him.

How did God do that? This is an example of sort of non‑prophetic prophecy, non‑prophetic communication between man and God. The reason why this is interesting, by the way, is because it leads to the interesting question which is, could there be this kind of communication today?

So for example, if you're wondering does God ever speak to us? Then you say, no, we live in a non‑prophetic age, God probably doesn't speak to us. So I speak to God, I pray, but God never speaks to me. That may not actually be true. Because there may not be prophecy today, but maybe there's non‑prophetic communication. This might be an example of a prototype of non‑prophetic communication, of this kind of communication between God and man which is non‑prophetic, which is just out there and in the world for you to see.

So let's just take it apart. We're going to go through this in slow motion. Let's just eliminate the possibilities and see if we can arrive at what must have happened here. If God never whispered into Joseph's ear and said, here's what the dreams mean. Remember there's a lot of people with a lot of skin in the game, who have a lot to gain by properly interpreting these dreams, notably all of Pharaoh's astrologers and sorcerers. You can imagine if you were the one to interpret the dream, no better shot for a great promotion in Pharaoh's court than that.

So all these guys have a great interest in doing it, but none of them can successfully interpret the dream. The question is how did it occur, how did it happen? So it must be that if God didn't actually speak to Joseph, where was the interpretation of that dream, where did Joseph get it from? What do you say?

Audience Member: He dreamt the same thing.

Rabbi Fohrman: He dreamt the same, but you all know that. Right, in other words, assuming there's no missing information in the Torah, the Torah tells you everything that you need to know. There's nothing that happens behind the scenes that you're not aware of. So where was it that Joseph somehow knew the interpretation of this dream? Silence.

Okay. Let me phrase it to you this way. Let's begin to take this apart. Let's remember Pharaoh's dream. Pharaoh has two dreams. Okay. Pharaoh has a dream about wheat, Pharaoh has a dream about cows.

Basically, the dreams are kind of the same. The dreams are, there's these wonderful sheaves of wheat, there's these seven sheaves of wheat, there's these seven cows. So there's seven beautiful cows and there's seven ugly cows. The seven ugly cows go and they swallow alive the seven beautiful cows. First, he sees seven beautiful cows then there's seven ugly cows. Seven ugly cows swallow the seven beautiful cows.

No one knows what this dream means. Everyone guesses, but no one knows. So Rashi talks about some of the guesses, the various sorcerers say, well, maybe those cows they're different types of crops, maybe they're daughters, maybe they are cities. There could be all sorts of things that the cows represent.

Now, Joseph comes with the correct interpretation. What is Joseph's interpretation? What are the cows? The cows are years. Now, if you think about that, that's really the only thing that Joseph comes to the table with. That one insight, cows are years.

You know, we're playing ‑‑ what's that millionaire game? Who Wants to Be a Millionaire. You know what I mean? One of the things you can do if you don't know is you get that like phone call to your friend.

So if you were Joseph and you got a phone call to your friend, you know it's like a phone call to God. God give me one piece of information, that once I have that one piece of information, I got the dream I can be able to figure out everything else. The one piece of information you'd want to know is, what are the cows, right? The second I know cows are years, I'm totally good. You know what I mean? Because then it's just algebra at that point, you just plug it in.

Cows equal years, okay. So if cows equal years, what do you think seven really good cows are? Seven really good years. What does seven really bad cows? Seven really bad years. What do you think it means when seven really bad cows swallow seven really good cows? It kind of means we're in trouble, because the seven bad years are going to be much worse and they're going to swallow any memory of the seven good cows.

So everything makes sense, once you know this one key really, which is cows equal years. C equals Y. At that point, once you have C equals Y, you can plug in the rest of the equation. It all makes sense.

So really the question is, if the least information that Joseph needs to understand in order to interpret the dreams is C equals Y, what do the cows equal? Cows equal years. The question we can redefine is how did God communicate that? How did God communicate that one insight as to what the cows equal?

Because remember, that one insight is quite a trippy insight, because the reason why no one can get it, why all of the magicians can't get it, is because it's actually counter‑intuitive that cows should equal years. That's like the last thing in the world you'd think cows equal.

Why? Why does it make so much more sense that cows should equal daughters, cows should equal crops, cows should equal cities, than that cows equal years? The answer is what are cows? Cows are things. So you would imagine that a cow ‑‑ obviously it's symbolic ‑‑ but it's going to represent some other thing. The notion that Joseph comes to the table with is that the cows ‑‑ it was, choose a volunteer who's been your friend for a while. What advantage does that give him?

Audience Member: That guy knows something nobody else did.

Rabbi Fohrman: That's right. Shared experience. There's a set of shared experience that Robby and a friend would have that no one else has. Maybe Robby went skiing with that guy five years ago. So whatever information I give Robby, let's say the information I give Robby, let's say my secret message is ‑‑ I don't know what my secret message is. My secret message is, I am worried that this cup of water is going to spill on my shoes. Right? So that's my message. He has to find a way to communicate that.

So maybe he could take it apart and maybe he is thinking about the set of shared experience he has with this guy. He remembers that the guy, when they were on the slopes, was very worried about breaking his leg. He was worried about something else, but he was worried, so at least that's worry. So he could say, okay, remember like five years ago, what was the emotion you were feeling? Now, hold that emotion. So that's like part of it and you could piece together, using the various things in your experiences, a code on the fly, to be able to communicate this message. You can imagine if Robby is very smart, he might be able to figure out a way to do it.

So God is very smart. Could God figure out a way to do that with Joseph? In other words, let's talk about God doing that with Joseph. Could there be elements in the dream itself of Pharaoh that resonate with the set of shared experience that is shared by God and Joseph and no one else? Maybe. Now, let's just define what that set of shared experience is.

What is the set of shared experience that God and Joseph share, they would know about, that no one else in the room, none of the magicians and Pharaoh would know about?

Audience Member: The whole thing with the brothers. Rabbi Fohrman: How big is the set of shared experience? Audience Member: Joseph's life.

Rabbi Fohrman: It's Josephs' life. Everything in Joseph's life Joseph's going to know because it's his life and God's going to know because He's God, but no one else is going to know because they're neither God nor Joseph. So that's like a perfect set of experience which maybe you can draw on to communicate some other message. In this case that message would be the proper interpretation of the dream.

So could that be inlaid within the dream itself? It would be wild to believe that it could be. How would you even do that? But now, we at least know what we might be looking for.

So here's what I want to do with you now. We're actually going to read through the dream and see if we can find this. Okay. An inlaid message in the dream itself that resonates with Joseph's life, that ultimately gives Joseph the answer, the key he's been looking for, that C equals Y. What the cows are, the cow's equal years. You understand what we're looking for? That's what we're looking for.

Okay. So let's read. We're now in Parashat Miketz and here we are. We're going to start from, Joseph being taken out of the pit. Verse 14. 224 in the Stone Chumash. Chapter Mem‑Alef, Verse Yud‑Daled, 41; 14.

"Vayikra et Yosef vayeritzuhu min habor." So he calls for Joseph. Now, what you're about to see is ‑‑ remember the narrator is talking to you, the reader. The Biblical narrator is relating events to you, the reader. But the Biblical narrator is going to narrate these events in such a way, I believe, to give us insight, if we're paying attention, to what Joseph's own experience of these event were like, to allow him to interpret the dream. You'll see what I'm talking about in a second, if that doesn't make sense to you.

So, "vayikrah et Yosef vayeritzuhu min habor," so they call for Joseph, Pharaoh calls for Joseph and pulls him out of jail. The only problem is that the word for jail that gets used here, is bor, which literally means pulled him out of the pit. Now you understand the problem here. He wasn't really in a pit right now, he was in jail.

Indeed, when he was first put in jail, the word that the Biblical narrator used to tell you jail, was bet hasohar, he was in jail. It doesn't say that they pulled him out of bet hasohar, it says they pulled him out of the pit. The problem is Joseph wasn't in a pit. Well, he wasn't in a pit now. He was in a pit all right, he just wasn't in a pit now. Thirteen years ago, he was in a pit, when he was 17 years old. That's when he was in a pit.

You see what happening, it seems like the Torah or the Biblical narrator is deliberately blurring the events. There's a blurring of the past and the present such that when he's being pulled out of jail the Torah's using the word pit to convey that it's almost like there's déjà vu, all over again experience for Joseph and it feels like he's being pulled out of the pit. It's like this moment 13 years ago when he was in a pit and he's being pulled out of the pit.

So you see already that in the lead up to the recitation of the dreams ‑‑ because Pharaoh's going to tell the dreams in just a moment ‑‑ you already see one of them to which is resonating with Joseph's own life. Joseph's getting primed for this idea, that oh, my gosh, this feels like my own life.

Now, if it was just this and the only thing I did was I gave you a class tonight and I said isn't it interesting that Joseph when he's pulled out of jail, it says the word bor, like he was pulled out of a pit. I bet that's this deep resonance with his previous life. So you might think, that's a very interesting theory, Fohrman, and you go home and you think nothing more of it.

If you were called upon to vote, believe, is this really true? In other words, is this a product of coincidence, does the Torah merely coincidentally use this word or is this meant to signify some sort of deep resonance of Joseph with his own previous life? If the only information or the only evidence that I gave you to suppose that this was not coincidental was this case, how many of you would be willing to bet your house that this is actually not coincidental, that this means what it is that I'm suggesting it means?

All in favor of betting your house, double or nothing, raise your hand. On the basis of this one indication, not many of you are raising your hand. Some of you, but not many of you. Right, because, you know, that's a pretty risky bet for one thing.

Now, you might say to me, if you want me to bet my house show me more. If you can show me that there are further resonances with Joseph's life, then maybe you can convince me. So let's keep on reading. As we read further, do we continue to find these resonances.

Next thing that happens is, after Joseph gets pulled out of the pit, "vayegalach vayechalef simlotav," he takes a haircut and then all of a sudden, he gets these shiny new clothes. Now think about that with Joseph's own life. His father gave him shiny new clothes. Not only did his father give him shiny new clothes ‑‑ what's the event that happens immediately prior to him being thrown in the pit? They strip him of his shiny new clothes. That's kind of interesting. So you say, all right, there's a second event that sort of reminds him of his previous life, the getting of these shiny new clothes.

So you say, all right, that's kind of interesting. Not quite sure that I'm convinced that it's not coincidental yet. Could you show me even more than this? As you keep on reading, are there further coincidences?

Now, not only can I show you more than this, but let's even define it a bit further. What we've begun to see, if it's not coincidental, which is a big if, but if it's not coincidental, you're beginning to see not just events that remind Joseph of his previous life, you're beginning to see a particular pattern in the events that remind Joseph of his previous life.

Let's define the pattern. Let's define it mathematically, because if we see a pattern, we can know what to predict that would be next in the pattern. So how are these events aligning with Joseph's previous life?

First, he gets pulled out of a pit and then he gets shiny new clothes. So okay. Its reversal, because back in his life, he was thrown in a pit and he lost his shiny new clothes right before that. So when you say it's a reversal, what you really mean, it's a reversal in two senses of the word. A, it's a reverse in terms of the significance of what's happening to him, because now he's being pulled out of the pit and he's getting shiny new clothes. Back then he was thrown in a pit and he lost his shiny new clothes. So that's one sense in which it's a reverse.

It's also a reverse in chronological order. Because back then, first he got stripped of his shiny new clothes and then he got thrown in a pit and this time, first he gets pulled out of the pit, so to speak, and then he gets the shiny new clothes.

So what you seem to be seeing, is a double reverse in these events. On the one hand, the events that are taking place now, are a reversal insignificance of the events of the selling of Joseph, but they're also a reversal chronologically of the events of the selling of Joseph. That should allow us to predict the next event in the pattern if it's not a coincidence.

If you just do it sort of algebraically, the next event in the pattern we would expect to happen, after Joseph was pulled out of the pit and after he got shiny new clothes, should be a reverse of events that took place 13 years ago in the selling of Joseph. It should be a reverse of an event that occurred before he was thrown in the pit and before he was stripped of his shiny new clothes. Whatever that event was, we should be now seeing the reverse of that. So let's look at the next event that we find in Parashat Miketz.

Next thing that happens is, "vayeritzuhu min habor," he gets taken out of the pit. He gets his new clothes. Next words, "vayavo el Pharaoh," he then goes to a man, Pharaoh. Now, what's the opposite of going to a man?

Audience Member: Leaving.

Rabbi Fohrman: Leaving a man. Oh, does that remind you of anything that happened in the selling of Joseph, before he was thrown in a pit and before he lost his shiny new clothes? Yeah, he left a man, he actually left two men, to be perfectly honest. The last man he saw was the guy who says they went that way and he left him. Right before that he left another man which would be who?

Audience Member: Jacob.

Rabbi Fohrman: His own father, Jacob. Now he's coming towards a man, Pharaoh. Now, if this is not a coincidence ‑‑ how many of you are getting ready to bet your house? If this is not a coincidence, so the Torah's saying something about who Pharaoh, kind of, is in this story. What role is Pharaoh occupying in the story? A role very similar to who's role in the selling of Joseph story? Or a reverse almost of the role of Jacob in that story, the father. Which explains a lot about Pharaoh.

You see, in the first story, father wasn't really there for Joseph when he needed him. Maybe it wasn't father's fault, but here Joseph is screaming to get pulled out of the pit, there's no answer. He's getting stripped of his clothes, he's screaming for father, there's no answer. Father is angry at him, sends him away.

All of a sudden, there's this new guy, who pulls me out of a pit, who gives me shiny new clothes. Who doesn't send me away, but brings me close. The question now is, like who's your Daddy now? Right, in other words, Pharaoh is occupying this very father‑like role for Joseph. Which is all very fine, but it, kind of, sets the stage for this week's parshah, in Parashat Vayechi. When Joseph is reunited with his own father and still has this very close relationship with his surrogate father, Pharaoh. He is very loyal to both of them and it's all very good except, what happens when the interest of those two fathers diverge? Who do you go to then?

Which explains what happens when Jacob all of a sudden, says you know, when I die, I need you to bury me in Canaan. Now, the question is, if you're Joseph, what does Pharaoh think about that? We're going to have a state funeral, an Egyptian state funeral for royalty in the backwater over there in Canaan? You know, what's NBC news going to say about that? We can't do that. So, this is when, where's your loyalty going to be now? Let's not quite get into that yet.

Anyway, back in our story, you begin to see these resonances between Joseph's own life and it's like is this coincidental or not? So you might say, well, I'm not quite ready to bet my house yet. Can you show me this pattern further? What is the pattern?

The pattern is a pattern of the next event that should happen in the Miketz story, should be in reverse of what happened back in the selling of Joseph story. A reverse of which event? Before I was thrown in the pit, before I lost my clothes, before father sent me away. Whatever the event before that is, what we're seeing now should be a reverse of that. A reverse of that event, let's call it X.

So let's go forward and see what event we have. The next thing that happens is, "Vayomer Pharaoh el Yosef, chalom chalamti u'poter ein oto," I had this dream and it's inscrutable. I cannot figure out what the dream means. I had this dream and I can't figure out what it means. What does that remind you of?

So here we have Joseph telling father‑figure, that's Pharaoh, I had this dream and I can't figure it out. So let's do the reverse game. What's the opposite of a dream that's inscrutable and can't be interpreted? A dream whose meaning is very obvious, perfectly obvious. Okay.

What's the opposite of a father‑figure, Pharaoh, telling a son about a dream? The opposite of that would be a son telling a father about a dream. Does this remind you of anything? That's exactly the event that happens in the selling of Joseph, before he was thrown in a pit, before he was stripped of his clothes and before father sent him away. The immediately preceding event was Joseph's second dream. The one about the sun and the moon and the stars. The dream in which Joseph tells his father about a dream and what did father think of that dream?

Do you think it was hard to interpret or easy to interpret? Pretty easy. Dead giveaway, wouldn't you say? 11 stars anyone? Sun and the moon? "Havo navo ani v'imcha v'achecha l'hishtachavot lecha artzah?" He doesn't miss a beat. We know the interpretation of that. The sun and the moon are me and Mom, the 11 stars are your 11 brothers. It's very obvious what it means. I'm mad about what it means.

By the way, what's the opposite of father being mad when he hears about the dream? Is father being happy when he hears the interpretation of the dream, which is exactly what happens in this case. Pharaoh is very happy to hear about this.

The final connection, by the way, is kind of, interesting. The final reverse is that when Pharaoh tells this dream to Joseph, the language is, "Vayomer Pharaoh el Yosef, chalom chalamti u'poter ein oto." Chalom chalamti. You know what the language of Joseph telling the second dream to father is? Chalamti chalom. Backwards.

So now, how many people are willing to bet their house? Starting to seem like a pretty good bet, double or nothing. It really doesn't seem coincidental, like something's going on here.

So now this is all the lead up to actually hearing the dream of Pharaoh. So now, we're going to play our game which is, as Joseph continues to hear this dream, will this déjà vu sense for Joseph continue? Will he continue to get to hear these resonances which are going to lead him to understand the meaning of the dream, that C equals Y, that cows equal years? Along the lines of Robby standing up here and playing the game. So let's read and see what we find.

Pharaoh starts telling Joseph the dream. He says, in my dream I was standing on the side of the river and out of the river came these seven beautiful cows, sheva parot, seven cows. Bri'ot basar, very healthy‑looking cows. V'yafot to'ar, very beautiful.

Now, if you were Joseph and you hear something described as very beautiful, what does that resonate with your own life? Who's very beautiful? He is. He is described as very beautiful. Now, it's not only him, who else in his life is described as very beautiful? His mother. Rachel is actually the only woman who is described as yefat to'ar v'yefat mareh in the Torah.

So Joseph's listening to this description of the cows and it's like, oh, my God, these cows, they're reminding me of myself or they're reminding me of my mother. They're Rachel cows or something? What's the deal with these cows. These are strange kind of cows.

Okay. So the next thing that happens is he hears about these cows that are very beautiful and the next thing Pharaoh says is, vatirenah b'achu. Now, what do those words mean? Rashi translates those to mean as, vatirenah, the root there is ro'eh, Reish‑ Ayin‑Hei. What does Reish‑Ayin‑Hei mean?

Reish‑Ayin‑Hei can have two meanings, depending on the context. If the subject of the verb is cows, so it would mean to graze. If the subject is a human being it would mean to shepherd.

Here the subject is cows, so it means to graze. So the cows were grazing, where were they grazing? Ba'achu, in an achu. The question is what's an achu? An achu is a unique word in Scripture, it never appears again in the Five Books of Moses. So Rashi's a little puzzled about what it means. Rashi guesses it means swamp.

Actually, if you go to Israel nowadays, you will find that the word achu in fact means swamp. It means swamp because Rashi guessed over here that it meant swamp, so that's why it means swamp.

You can imagine that if you weren't Rashi, you can imagine you might come up with another possible interpretation of that word, which actually, Onkelos comes up with, a commentator who precedes Rashi. Onkelos doesn't think it means swamp. He thinks Alef‑Chet‑Vav means something else. What would you think Alef‑Chet‑Vav might mean?

Audience Member: Brothers.

Rabbi Fohrman: Brothers. Echav. Vatirenah ba'achu, could mean that these cows, these beautiful cows, were grazing with their brother cows. Now, the brother cows would obviously mean the next set of cows, because they're going to be these ugly cows. Now, if you were Joseph and you thought that the beautiful cows reminded you of you and that was a resonance in your life. The next thing you hear is that these cows are grazing with their brother cows, what would that remind you of? Especially because the word ro'eh can have two meanings, depending on the subject. If it's cows it could mean graze, but if it's people like him, it could mean shepherd?

Let's try the second meaning. What would it mean for the dream we were talking about, these brothers that reminded him of himself, shepherding with his brothers? What moment in his life does that remind him of? It reminds him of the very first moment of the selling of Joseph, all the way back at the beginning. We're going backwards through the story. We're now at the beginning of the story, the very first words of Parashat Vayeshev, the very beginning of the selling of Joseph starts, "Yosef ben sheva‑esrei shanah," when Joseph was 17 years old, what was he doing? "Hayah ro'eh et echav batzon," he was shepherding with his brothers, the sheep.

So Joseph was thinking, oh, my God, this is the story. Pharaoh is dreaming about my life. There was me and I was shepherding with my brother cows, there were me cows, that was like the Rachel cows, then there were these brother cows, probably like Leah cows that I was shepherding with. I'd bet the other cows were Leah cows, they're ugly, right. That's what he's thinking. So now, that's not a nice thing to say about Leah, but maybe it's what the Chumash is saying. So there are these ugly cows, and let's just check out the math, because when Pharaoh starts talking about these second cows, listen to what he says. "Hinei sheva parot acheirot olot achareihen," then there were these other cows, "dalot v'ra'ot to'ar me'od," they were really ugly, "v'rakot basar." Isn't that interesting? They were "rakot" (ugly).

Now, it's spelled differently, but as a harmonium, the word rakot just happens to be the only physical description in Hebrew that you ever get of Leah, "v'einei Leah rakot," the eyes of Leah were ugly. So Joseph is going, oh, my gosh, there really are. There are these Joseph cows, these Rachel cows, these yafot to'ar cows, there are these rakot cows, these Leah cows. They're all shepherding together in the field, it's like me and my brothers. Then the next thing that happens makes his blood run cold, because the next event that happens is the ugly cows swallow alive the beautiful cows.

Now, if you're paying attention, if the ugly cows are the sons of Leah and the beautiful cows are the sons of Rachel, so what does it mean that the ugly cows, all of a sudden, swallow the beautiful cows? What event would that be? Where we're all shepherding in the fields but then one day what happened? I disappeared, they swallowed me. That's the pit, that's the selling of Joseph. Remember what Pharaoh says, when the ugly cows swallow the beautiful cows, what do the ugly cows look like afterwards?

They're still ugly and they're still just as thin as before. "Ve'lo noda ki ba'u el kirbenah," Pharaoh said, and you couldn't even tell that they'd ever eaten the beautiful ones.

Joseph thinks that was the sale. Here the brothers come, they go back to Father and they look exactly like they did before. It looks like I just disappeared from the family without a trace. The great unsolved crime. They don't look like they're culprits, they don't look any different than before. I just disappeared from the family and life goes on as if I was never there. So this is a pretty scary dream that he's hearing.

Now, there's only one problem with this interpretation and Joseph must have been aware of this problem. The problem is that the numbers are all wrong. Because if it's really true that the beautiful cows represent Joseph or Rachel, so how many should there be of them? You would think if they were Joseph and Rachel cows, there's only going to be two of them or maybe one of them. Like something like that, there shouldn't be seven of them. Similarly, the sons of Leah cows, like his brother cows, there should be six of them, there shouldn't be seven of them. So it's like the numbers are wrong, why is it that there are these two sets of seven cows?

So it turns out that ‑‑ and by the way, when I originally gave this talk, years ago, when I first kind of figured out this stuff, so I didn't figure out the part that I'm about to tell you now. So I had a different conclusion, which was wrong, that I came to at the end of this talk and I gave this wrong conclusion, but until now it seemed so cool and it seemed like a really good talk. So I remember talking with my wife on the way back and asking her what do you think of that lesson? So like any man, I'm waiting for my wife to praise me and say what a wonderful lesson it is. So she goes and says, well, it's pretty good except for the end. So I was thinking, what do you mean it's pretty good except for the end? I thought that was a really marvelous shiur. She goes, no, the end, you're missing something in the end, but you'll figure it out one of these days. I was very perturbed by that.

So the next day I'm on a train to Baltimore, I was speaking there and I can't get her comment out of my head. I was like what do you mean it was all good except for the end? So I was like, I get up and I fish my Tanach out of my backpack and as I'm doing that, and I'm looking in Parashat Miketz, I'm kind of standing up on the train looking in Parashat Miketz, trying to figure this out, did I miss something? Just then, the train swerves around the bend ‑‑ if you've ever been on Amtrak, it's not always gentle ‑‑ and pushes me into the opposite row. I'm apologizing to the person that I just fell on and meanwhile I lost my place in my Tanach and I open it up and I'm about to get back to Miketz but I just happen to notice, the page that the Tanach happened to open to was a page in Vayeitzei.

It happened to be the page which included the verse that was the key to the dream, which is the verse ‑‑ because remember it is just one verse that gives the physical descriptions of Rachel and Leah. That's just one verse, "v'einei Leah rakot v'Rachel haitah yefat to'ar v'yefat mareh," those are the descriptions which are appearing now for these cows. Are you with me? My eye just caught the very next verse. Because if you look at that verse, the verse which is the key to the dream, "v'einei Leah rakot v'Rachel haita yefat to'ar v'yefat mareh," in Parashat Vayeitzei, when Jacob is first introduced to these women. The very next verse is, "Vayomer Yaakov el Lavan," and Jacob said to Laban, "e'evadcha sheva shanim b'Rachel bitcha haketanah," I'll work for seven years for Rachel, your little daughter.

In the end those seven years turned into seven more years, seven years for Rachel, seven years for Leah. All of a sudden, Joseph, knowing the family history, figures it out. He says, I know what your dream means, I know what the cows are. The cows are years, it's the only possible explanation, C equals Y. In other words, in my dream, the only way to make the dream work out is that when you were envisioning me and my brothers in the fields, the seven cows didn't represent me and they didn't represent Rachel. The seven cows didn't represent the sons of Leah.

You know what they represented? They represented the seven years that my father worked for Rachel and the seven years that my father worked for Leah. What the dream was really saying was that when me and my brothers were shepherding in the fields, in the language of the dream, that's portrayed as if the seven years of time that my father worked for Rachel were shepherding together with the seven years of time that my father shepherded for Leah, such that when they threw me in the pit it was as if seven years were lost from his life. It was as if the seven beautiful years of Rachel were just swallowed and gone, as if those years were of no consequences because I was out of his life.

The reason why the dream is portraying it that way is because when me and my brothers were shepherding in the field, we were the fruits of those years. We're only there because of those years. We are the tangible product of those years, but you could portray what was happening in terms of the years themselves shepherding in the fields. That's what's happening, that's why there were seven years and that's why there's seven years here, that's why there's seven years there. Which will explain, by the way, the imagery particularly of cows. Why? Because cows in Hebrew, how do you spell a cow?

Pei‑Reish‑Hei. Now, if you take Pei‑Reish‑Hei, what's the other meaning of Pei‑Reish‑Hei other than cow? Parah, fruits of the wombs, p'rei u'revei.

Jacob was in fact told p'rei u'revei, Pei‑Reish‑Hei, have lots of children. So cows could be a metaphor for the children of, right, the cows are the children of the years. But one second. What was I doing dreaming about wheat? I'm a cattle rancher, why was I dreaming about wheat? The answer might be, one second, if Pharaoh was dreaming about cows and when he was dreaming about cows, Pharaoh was really dreaming about my past. Maybe when I was dreaming about wheat, back then, what was I dreaming about? Maybe I was dreaming about Pharaoh's future or a future in Pharaoh's house. Then he kicks himself because he's thinking to himself, one second, that would mean that we all kind of got the dream wrong.

It never meant that I'm supposed to be in charge of this family with everyone bowing to me. It was forecasting an event that would occur some years later. Think about what it would mean. The brothers' sheaves bowing to my sheaves. Well, what happens later in life? Later in life my brothers would become desperate for what? For wheat. And who's going to have all the wheat? I am. So in effect, they're going to come bowing to me because I'm going to be in charge of all the wheat. It was forecasting this moment. It wasn't saying that you're supposed to be the 17‑year‑old with everyone bowing down to you. It was saying there's going to become a time when you're going to be in a position where you can take care of your desperate brothers and what are you going to do with that?

In a way, it was setting up Pharaoh's dream. If Pharaoh's dream says take care of your family, this dream was saying there's going to come a moment when you're going to be in a position to take care of your family. When they're going to come bowing to you for the wheat. But then he says, one second, I had two dreams, right. So I had a dream about wheat, but I also had a dream about the sun and the moon and the 11 stars. I wonder what that meant. We all thought we knew. We all thought it meant that Father and Mother and the 11 brothers are all bowing to us, but maybe it meant something else. Because the one thing I know from Pharaoh's dreams is that when you have two dreams, they really both mean the same thing in different terms. Almost like ones a key to the other.

So one second. The sun and the moon and the 11 stars. What's one of the things I learn from Pharaoh's dream? C equals Y, when there's a thing and you don't what it means, perhaps counterintuitively that thing doesn't symbolize anything, it symbolizes time. The unit of time it could symbolize might be years; cows equal years. Okay. So I had dream, the sun and the moon and the 11 stars are all bowing to me. How many heavenly bodies are there in that dream? Eleven stars plus the sun and moon, equals 13. How old was I when I had that dream? 17 years old. How old am I now, that I'm standing in front of Pharaoh interpreting his dreams? The Torah tells us how old he was, he was 30. How many years have elapsed since I had those dreams when I was 17? Thirteen years have elapsed.

What did the dream mean? Maybe the dream meant in 13 years everyone's going to bow to you because you're going to be in charge of all the wheat. Both dreams mean the same thing. In 13 years, your family is going to be desperate and you're going to be in a position to help them because you're going to be in charge of all the wheat. The dreams mean the same thing.

Okay. Now back to the Shabbos table a week ago with Avigail's question. How does creation fit in to all of this? How does the secret of the Cherubs fit in to all of this? Well, you and I stood here about a month ago and we went through creation and we went through the story of the Tabernacle. One thing emerged ‑‑ many things emerged from that, but one of the things that emerged from that is that when the Torah tells us the story of creation, it's actually telling us, in veiled language, a very sophisticated scientific story, but through parables, through meshalim. The meshalim, the parables are sort of human‑based parallels of what it was.

One of the things we found was that the sun and the moon and the stars represented something. What did they represent? Remember, the way the Torah characterizes the sun, moon and the stars, the creation, is not significant because the sun provides heat and light, but significant specifically, because they're time markers. "V'hayu l'otot u'lemoadim u'le'yamim v'shanim." Isn't that interesting? The way they're first characterized is as time markers.

We actually decided something else too, that what that actually is, is a parable for the creation. We talked about the three prime events of creation, the three main havdalot, the three fundamental significant infrastructure events of creation. The creation of light, the creation of space and finally the creation of time itself. The Torah uses the sun and the moon and the stars as a metaphor to actually discuss the creation of the dimension of time, which is one of the three great infrastructure developments of the universe as we know it.

That means, that in the Torah itself, the sun and the moon and the stars are symbolic. They actually represent time. Isn't that interesting then? If you think, when was the first time ‑‑ pardon the pun ‑‑ that God communicated to Joseph that things might be time? The answer might have been, not with C equals Y, cows equal years, not even with the baker when the loaves and everything equals days, but going all the way back to his own dream. When he dreamed about the sun and the moon and the stars, those represented years because what are the sun and the moon and starts most basically? When they were created, all they were was actually representations for time. They meant time. "V'hayu l'otot u'lemoadim u'le'yamim v'shanim," it can mean either days or years. In this case it means years; 13 years.

Okay. So now, let's come back to this issue which is so what do dreams mean? Are they prophecy, are they nonsense or are they neither? Well, they don't seem they're nonsense, but they don't quite seem like they're prophecy either. This was like a non‑prophetic communication. You might even imagine that we could have this kind of communication. If you stick around afterwards, I'll tell you a story about this kind of communication. But leaving that for a moment, so what are these dreams?

It's so infuriating because the Torah, when it tells us these dreams, like, you and I, if we're right about all this, it takes a lot of work to unlevel this, it's not like this is so obvious. So it's like, why can't the Torah just be ‑‑ if you have a message that you want to communicate to Joseph, just say it like you said it before. You know, just, hello, Joseph, I just want you to know in 13 years ‑‑ like how come it's got to be so tricky? What is it that we mean for that? What are the meaning of dreams?

Now, let's talk about what the brothers thought the meaning of the dreams were. The brothers, when they got these dreams, when they heard these dreams, what did they think the dreams were? Did they think they were prophecy? Maybe, but what did they also think? Remember they threw Joseph in a pit because of these dreams. Here's how things are looking from ‑‑ the Torah gives us the brothers perspective. The Torah says, "Yosef ben sheva‑esrei shanah hayah ro'eh et echav batzon." But what was he doing? The very next verse says he was bringing, "dibatam ra'ah el avihem," he was bringing bad reports back to his father about the brothers.

So we already know this isn't a happy situation, he's saying evil speech about his brothers, the brothers aren't so happy about that. Father favors him, gives him this coat. The brothers see that Father favors him, Father loves him and yet he's being not very nice to us. This doesn't look like a very good situation. All of a sudden, he comes and has these dreams. Not only does he have these dreams, bad enough he has the dreams, but he tells us the dreams. Like, why does he have to tell us the dreams? What's that about?

From the brothers' perspective maybe these dreams were prophetic, but the other possibility is what are these dreams? Delusions of grandeur. It would be just like Joseph to have these dreams, wouldn't it?

That's how he sees us, isn't it? He's the guy who lords over us, even though he's the younger brother, bringing back all this stuff to the brothers. Now Joseph is thinking, I don't know, I'm just a nice little guy, I can't help that my father likes me. It's true, I mean I do say some things now and then, but Dad has to know. It's like, I had these dreams, what was I supposed to do? I didn't ask for these dreams, they seem prophetic to me. But the brothers' perspective is no, your head is getting away with you. This is your imagination going out of control. Who's right? Are these dreams prophetic, like Joseph thinks? Or are these dreams nonsense, like the brothers think?

The answer is, neither is right or to some extent, both are right. Here's the story. Now let's get back to Avigail's question. What is the word rule doing in here? It doesn't seem coincidental, but it's the wrong dream. It's a reference to the first dream, not the second dream. Here's the theory I want to suggest to you. Joseph has a dream about the sheaves of wheat. At the time, where does that dream come from? The brothers are right, it comes from his imagination. It's delusions of grandeur, it's his subconscious running away with himself. He is telling evil speech about his brothers, he is favored by his father.

Now, if you confronted Joseph with that and said this is a delusion of grandeur, he wouldn't see that because it was just a dream. It's his subconscious running away with him. His conscious mind isn't trying to see himself lording over the brothers, but his subconscious mind is. Subconsciously, this is the position that he's in and his subconscious just came up with this dream about the wheat and the brothers are mad because it's just like you to have your subconscious come up with a dream like that. To some extent the brothers are right. How do you know? Because of Avigail's question.

The next thing that happens is he has a dream about the sun and the moon and the stars, that seems to be the same thing. Now why would he have that dream next? The answer is what's his subconscious doing? He had the dream about the wheat and the next thing that happened is the brothers responded to it and what did they say? "Hamaloch timloch aleinu, im mashol timshol banu," are you ruling over us? Now what's Josephs response? Hey, I wasn't really thinking about that, but like, maybe that's the point. That's really interesting that you would say, "hamaloch timloch aleinu, im mashol timshol banu," that I'd be ruling over everyone. What do you think of that? That night he goes to sleep with the brothers' words on his mind, "hamaloch timloch aleinu, im mashol timshol banu;" am I meant to rule over this family?

Then he has another dream. Is it coincidental that the next dream he has is of the sun and the moon and the stars all bowing to him? It's like those words were sticking in his subconscious mind, "hamashol timshol banu," and the next dream that his subconscious conjures up is of heavenly bodies whose whole purpose is limshol, to rule. Except the dream is a reverse, he's ruling over them, they're all bowing to him. Because his subconscious mind is validating it. Yeah, you really are in charge, you're the guy. He thinks that's what it means and he walks in and he says the dream, that I'm having this dream. The brothers and father are like, no, your subconscious is getting away with you, this is crazy. I mean, we're supposed to do this? That's the nonsense part, but it's not nonsense, I said, because time will tell that these dreams do mean something.

So what happened? The real meaning of Joseph's dreams is actually an amalgam of two different elements. It starts with Joseph's subconscious mind, in a somewhat dysfunctional, somewhat not so great relationship with his brothers, having these dreams that anyone might have. But then God comes and says, but I am going to put meaning in these dreams, and in fact the dreams do have meaning, it's a product of his mind, but later on he will see that God makes use of the product of his mind to convey information that this kid needs to know. He's going to figure it out just in time to be able to save his family. The information is that in 13 years they're all going to be desperate and what are you going to do?

All of a sudden, there's going to be this moment, where in order to get out of jail, you're going to have to interpret a dream of a sovereign monarch, but the only way you can interpret it, is to arrive at another conclusion too, which is to understand that I'm telling you what you've got to do. That when your family is desperate for the food, you're the beautiful cows and they're the ugly cows and your job is to give it to them. So in your subconscious mind, that you're creating these dreams, I'm taking those dreams and imprinting meaning. You think that you know the meaning of your dreams, you think it's all so simple. You think that the sun and the moon and the 11 stars mean the father and the mother and the brothers are all bowing? Well you're wrong.

The way I see it, God says, the thing to pick up on, on that dream is not what your subconscious mind is picking up on, the word rule, that you heard, which is getting you to think of the sun and the moon and the 11 stars. It is true that creation is the key to the meaning of the dream of the sun and the moon and the 11 stars, but not the way you think. The key of creation is that the sun and the moon and the 11 stars themselves are metaphors. They're metaphors for time and the real meaning of the dream is that these are 13 years. I think ‑‑ and let me just close with the idea that what does the dream really mean, the sun and the moon and the 11 stars? If you just add it up and do the math it means that the sun and the moon and the 11 stars, which represent time itself, as we said a month ago or so, are bowing to you. So now what does the dream mean?

It doesn't just mean, in 13 years people will bow to you. Think about what the dream is actually saying. The sun and the moon and the 11 stars are bowing to you. What are the sun and the moon and the 11 stars? Time. So what does the dream really mean? It means time is bowing to you. It means 13 years are bowing to you. What does that mean?

I want to close with this thought. That meaning, that deep meaning, is a final consolation prize for Joseph, I believe. Here Joseph is, his life is ruined, he was 17 years old, it was all good. He was a kid, life looked up. I'm in charge of my father's horse, I'm having these dreams of grandeur, everything is great.

In a flash, life changes from magnificent to the worst thing in the world. I'm sacked, I'm thrown into a pit, I'm carried off into Egypt as a slave. Just when life looked like it was getting a slightly bit better, in Potiphar's house, I'm framed and I'm thrown in prison to rot.

When he's in prison rotting, year after year is slipping away and he is in dungeon and everyone has forgotten about him. His family has forgotten about him, Potiphar has forgotten about him, everyone who cares about him has forgotten about him and year after year slips away. He thinks what hope do I ever have to ever get out of here?

In those moments, what is his greatest enemy, after another year slips away and another year slips away? The answer is, his greatest enemy is time itself, at this point.

Did you see the Wizard of Oz? Do you know what the most terrifying moment of the movie of the Wizard of Oz is, the one that always got me when I was a kid? It's when the wicked witch locks up Dorothy in her castle and takes the hourglass and turns it over and says these sands of life, this is the time of your life. When the sands evaporate, so does your life, you will die. She watches as the sands just fall and at that moment time is her enemy. Everyone has forgotten about her, who's going to save her? She's locked in the dungeon and all she can do is watch herself getting older and she just has an hour.

That's Joseph and he looks and I'm all alone and now the great enemy that I cannot do battle against is time. Except his dreams give him one last little piece of consolation. His dream says the 13 years, those years are the worst 13 years of your life. The years where everyone forgot about you. The years where you think that time itself is your enemy and you're going to die in dungeon, time is not your enemy, time is your servant, time is bowing to you.

Those 13 years are working for you. You don't know how, but I, God, know how. The seeds are being planted and after these 13 years, you will emerge and you will be in charge of the world. You will be the most powerful man there is. You will be the only one in a position to take care of your family and you're going to see them again and you have a chance to get back together with them. Time is working for you. You just need to wait until the moment where time can do its work and you can come out.

The final consolation was, the sun and the moon and the stars are just time. You think it's your enemy, you think that it's ruling over you. You are, in fact, ruling over it.

So if you want to stick around for three minutes, I'll just tell you the story. I told you, I'll tell you the story. If you've got to go, you've got to go, but here's the story. The story goes like this.

About a year or so ago, I gave a version of this talk in another city. I don't want to even say what city it was, because it's going to give away certain information that might embarrass people, so I'm going to pretend it's Cleveland, but it's not. Okay?

So let's imagine I'm in Cleveland and I'm giving this talk. Now, I hadn't seen all the stuff in this talk yet. The stuff that was just a week old, is just what I told you now. So forget about all that, but I was talking about the basic interpretation of Pharaoh's dream which I had seen back then. I kind of ended the talk at the moment where I said that look, you know, this is an example of non‑prophetic communication, where God seemingly can kind of tap on Joseph's shoulder. He didn't really speak to Joseph, but he told him everything that was important for him to know. All happened in these dreams and Joseph was the only person to know it.

What was the vehicle? The vehicle was that, if you think about it, the slate that the God used for communication with Joseph, was really just Joseph's life. All Joseph had to do was be observant. He had to actually pay attention to events and when they resonated with his own life, pay attention and connect the dots and say oh, that's what it means.

Now, the danger of course in all of this is, that you can do it the wrong way. In other words, you can misinterpret things. When Joseph has his dreams, when he's 17 years old and they are meaningful ultimately, but at the time he misinterprets it, so a very dangerous thing, is thinking you know.

Here's the danger, the danger is, it's one thing for God to tap you on the shoulder, it's another thing to know exactly what that means. You can easily misinterpret it because you don't have enough information. Think even Joseph. Joseph can't know really what the dreams mean, until nine more years elapse and he sees his brother and then he finally gets it, he finally understands what his original dreams mean. He just doesn't have all the information available to understand the dreams.

That puts Joseph actually in a very difficult position. When he first has his dreams, he has this intuition that, oh, my gosh, the sun and the moon and the 11 stars probably mean something. It does mean something, but it's also the product of his imagination and the real truth is, he doesn't yet have the information to be able to properly interpret the dreams.

The mistake he makes at that moment is to jump from the very correct observation that God is telling me something, to and therefore I need to figure it out now and here's what it probably means when you have no idea what it probably means.

We might face the same thing. In other words, in our lives it may well be that you and I are also subject to non‑prophetic communication. There may well be moments in our lives where God is tapping us on the shoulder, there's these events that resonate in our lives.

It's a very attractive notion, this notion that your life is this slate, it's this set of experience that you share with God and you and God are the only ones in the room who know what it is and God can write on that slate and tell you think the same way that He told Joseph. You can have these moments where you say, oh my God, this is not coincidental, this is resonating with my life, I know this isn't coincidental. I bet my house, this is not coincidental, I just know it is.

Then, the next challenge you have is, so what is God telling me? That's where you get into trouble because you don't always know. There's a difference between knowing that God is saying something and knowing what God is saying. Sometimes you just have the patience to say, God is saying something, but I don't know what it is and it is dangerous for me to assume that I do. So something's going on, but I don't know what it is. At that point you might say, so why is God telling me this if I don't know what it is? If I can't figure out what it is, why is God tapping me on the shoulder?

To which the answer might just be, even if you don't know what it is, the fact that God is tapping you on the shoulder and saying something to you is itself life‑changing, even if you don't know the message.

A life lived with taps on the shoulder from God is different than a life lived without taps on the shoulder from God, if you think about it really in a spiritual kind of way. You don't have to answer this question, but if you just pose this question to yourself for a moment. Ask yourself, do you walk around every day with the feeling like God is with you and is walking with you and is accompanying you through every moment of your life? Do you walk around with that feeling? Does your life feel that way?

Now, you can imagine the difference between a life that feels that way and a life that doesn't feel that way. I think, the truth is that if you ask people to look into their hearts, many people, even many religious people would have to answer that question, no. Now, they wouldn't be honest and say that the answer to that question is no, because it sounds like such a terrible thing to say, but in their heart of hearts you have to say do I really feel like the Master of the Universe is with me every step of the way and is experiencing everything vicariously that I am experiencing and is just with me in life? You might say no.

If you could interview somebody that felt that way and they're honest with you and you asked a follow up question. The follow up question was, why do you feel that way? Why do you not feel that, you're a religious person, why is it that you don't feel that God is in your life every step of the way?

What that person might say, if they're honest is, you know, the Master of the universe, He's got a lot of things on his mind. He's got the Andromeda Galaxy to worry about, He's got the universe to worry about, He's got His angels to worry about. Just here on Earth, this little planet, He's got 4 billion people to worry about, there's major world crises going on, what does little old me really rate that God is going to spare that precious time thinking about me?

That's what you might think. Except, what if a person like that lived his life and then one day got this tap on the shoulder, which he was absolutely sure was not coincidental, which he would bet his house on that God was talking to him. He doesn't know what it means, but God in that moment was talking to me.

If you knew that, that God, right at that moment, was with me, was saying something that I don't know what it is, but He was saying something to me I am sure, I'm willing to bet my house on that. That's life‑changing because if God was with you then and you know that you mattered enough right then, that God was with you, you think He left?

God could always be with you, you just saw it right then, but you did see it then, that is itself life changing. Maybe you don't know but you don't have to know sometimes. Just knowing that God reached out to you itself, even if you don't know what He's saying, is itself of major spiritual moment.

So I gave this talk and that's kind of how I ended it, in let's say Cleveland and some guy in the back of the room raises his hand. He says, so Rabbi, I have a question for you. Do you ever get these taps on the shoulder in your own life?

Now, I hadn't been prepared for that question. So I gave him an answer, but at the time that I gave the answer, I didn't really realize it, but I sort of evaded the question. I said something that kind of threw him off the trail, but I didn't really answer the question and here's what I said.

I said, well, let me tell you about my interest in this topic. You know why I'm interested in this topic? Because when I was a kid, my father, of blessed memory, was struggling with cancer. As he went through that journey of a battle against cancer, he was quite sure that he had these moments in which there were these taps on the shoulder in his own life.

It wasn't just one event, there were a number of such events and I was a kid, I was just 10, 11 years old, nine years old, but he would share with me some of these moments and he would tell me about them. They were spooky kind of things and they always stayed with me and I always wondered with them, like, they always kind of haunted me.

Like for example, he had a dream once. He was in remission for about two years, he thought it was over, everything was fine and then he has this dream. The dream is that there's these two monsters that are battling each other, these two like dragons and in the background of the dream he's seeing these places in his life that he lived; San Francisco and Arlinda and these various different places and the final place that he sees, the final scene of this battle, is actually Berkeley, California, where we were living at the time.

It's like in his own front yard and in his own front yard, one of these monsters kills the other monster and slays him. Then he wakes up and, this battle going on of my life, maybe between me and cancer and someone's going to win and the final act is here. If that's what it means then maybe I should see my doctor to see if I've had a recurrence. He went to see his doctor and he in fact had a recurrence and there was a mass that they had to treat, he went back into chemotherapy.

He had a number of things like this, but he would tell me about these things so if you imagine you're a nine, 10‑year‑old kid and you hear about this from your father, it's pretty heavy and you're trying to kind of process it.

So who are you going to process it with? You know, somebody out of the family you want to talk it over with. Who are you going to go to? I went to my teacher. I'm a little kid, I have a little fifth‑grade teacher, so I go to my teacher and I say like ‑‑ I didn't give him the whole story, but I just said to him because I'm thinking, my father, he's sick and maybe he's desperate, he's grasping at straws and is this real? Is this not real? So I just kind of asked my teacher, I say, so dreams. If somebody has a dream and they think it's significant, there might be something going on in the dream. Do you think that dream could really be significant? Do you think that God could really be talking to people through dreams in some sort of veiled way?

My fifth‑grade teacher, just getting that question said, you've really got to put that out of your mind. That's just nonsense. God doesn't speak to people in dreams and he quoted a Talmud or two that dreams are full of nonsense and I went home.

I was kind of chagrined as a nine‑year‑old kid to feel that my teacher just thought it was all nonsense and I came back and I told my father that. I said, Dad, you know, I was talking to me teacher, I asked him about dreams. He actually thinks it's all nonsense.

My father just laughed and said, okay, but your teacher isn't really experiencing what I am experiencing right now. This is what's going on in my life. I would expect him to say that, given his experience, but he's not experiencing what I am experiencing. I think if he was experiencing what I am experiencing, he might change his mind. So that's fine, that's what he thinks, but here's what I'm going through.

Over time, this had always been a question that kind of haunted me. So I said, it's interesting, later in life, many years later, to be going through the Joseph story and to seem to find evidence that the Torah itself thinks that these dreams, which might in fact be products of your own subconscious, are not just products of your own subconscious, but God can get involved and actually inlay stuff that's really a tap on the shoulder and is really telling you stuff. The Torah itself says that's a way of non‑prophetic communication. That was kind of meaningful.

That was the answer that I gave that fellow in Cleveland that night and then, I got in my car to leave to one final talk that I was giving across town and then going home. Now, I was very tired because I had been up since 4:00 in the morning to get a flight and I was completely exhausted in the car, thinking about this next talk that I was going to give.

I was supposed to give a talk on some other topic that my head really wasn't in anymore and I just said, you know the heck with it, they're off in the other part of town, I'm just going to change my topic, I'm just going to speak about the same thing I spoke about in this little group of people over here. I'm just going to redo the same talk, I'm too exhausted to think of anything else. I'm going to talk about Joseph and Pharaoh's dreams one more time.

I get there and the ride that's taking me there is late and there's a much bigger talk than before. There's like 250 people and they're all milling around waiting for me to arrive. Meanwhile, I had this PowerPoint set up, so I had to plug in my computer and the computer is not plugging into the projector properly, so I can't get the thing going and time is wasting, as like 10 more minutes and everyone is kind of grumbling and I'm sweating, trying to make this thing work and it's not really working.

Just then, I hear this voice from behind me. He says, hey, Rabbi Fohrman, do you remember me? And he's talking and I'm thinking, oh gosh, this some guy in the crowd who wants to play Jewish geography with me, you know even though it's like, could you pick a worse time than this? Can't you see that I'm struggling with my projector and maybe I'll talk to you later? So I just ignore the guy.

Then it's like, no, Rabbi Fohrman, no. Do you remember who I am? I have something to show you, I want to show it to you. He like, won't shut up, this guy. It's like he just has to talk to me. So I was like, okay.

I get up from my computer and I was like, you want to know if I remember you? I look at this guy and I remember him. I say, one second, you're my fifth‑grade teacher from Berkeley, California and it was really true, it was him. I hadn't seen him in 25 years and there he is in Cleveland and it didn't even hit me what happened, until after this talk.

After the talk, it's like, do you get what just happened? You just gave a talk about these taps on the shoulder and someone just asked you a question which is, do you get these taps on the shoulder?

The fact is that, although you related a personal story from your own life, you actually avoided the question because the question was, do you ever get these taps on the shoulder? You didn't say yes, you told a story about someone else, your father who seemingly got this.

Now, why didn't you answer that question? Why did you avoid the question? The reason why I avoided the question, probably was because I didn't really think that I got those kinds of taps on the shoulder.

Maybe my father did, so I talked about that. Maybe it was embarrassing to say that, no, I don't really see in my own life that I ever got these taps, so I just avoided the question.

So God looks at that situation and says, oh so you don't think you're getting enough taps on the shoulder, is that what it is? So right before my next talk about taps on the shoulder, who should come along, God's sense of humor, to give you the tap on the shoulder? The guy who says there's no such thing as taps. We'll have him do it. He has no idea what it is, he just communicated that.

For me it's like, I didn't even realize that at the time. It happened to be after the talk, when I like played it over in slow motion, it's like, did you see what happened there? Did you put it together?

That's the way life is. These things can happen and you could just miss it, but if you are observant, you don't know what it means, I don't know what it meant, but I'm quite sure that it wasn't coincidental. When that stuff happens and I think it happens, it's not a good idea to try overanalyzing it because you may not have the information and overanalyzing it, when you don't have the information might get you thrown in a pit. So that's not a good idea to do, but to understand that it wasn't coincidental and that it was God, I think is itself is something constructive. So that was the story.