

Joseph

My name is Joseph. I am the 11th son in a blended family of four mothers and one father. My mother is Dad's favorite wife and I am the favorite son. Of course, my brothers were jealous! Did I handle it well? No, in fact, I have been told that in your day my social skills would have earned me a diagnosis of "on the spectrum."

I started having dreams after Dad gave me a richly ornamented coat. The first dream was that we were all binding sheaves and my brothers' sheaves bowed down to mine. I actually told my brothers the whole thing! I thought they would be interested. The follow-up was a dream in which the sun, moon and stars bowed down to me. Dad heard about that one, too. I have been told that there is something in your day called "Facebook" where people do that sort of thing!

Dad had more heart to heart talks with me than my brothers and I learned a lot that helped me deal with adversity. Dad travelled to the ancestral family home in Haran and worked seven years for the privilege of marrying his beautiful cousin Rachel, only to be cheated by his uncle Laban into marrying Leah first. It was necessary, Laban said, "because she was the eldest." She was also homely. That is why I am the best looking of the brothers. I don't remember if I told them that, but I might have. Dad had to work another seven years for Rachel and then six years for herds and flocks. But he knew that the LORD was with him because he had seen a vision of a stairway to heaven and heard directly from the LORD.

Dad also told me about his row with Esau, his twin brother. Dad had basically cheated Esau out of his birthright. It wasn't hard to do because Esau did not really value immaterial things. But when Dad was coming back home from Haran, he feared a violent welcome. On the way, one night, he was confronted by a man who wrestled him to a standstill but then dislocated his hip – just to show that he could do it. Dad said. "I will not let you go unless you bless me." "Then the man said, "Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with men and have overcome."

Next up was the meeting with Esau. Dad made elaborate preparations, sending gifts and separating the party into groups in case of attack. But in the end, Esau did not hold a grudge. He actually taught his brother how to forgive and how to be forgiven. That was something else I learned out of my father's life.

At 17, Dad finally thought he would let me out of his sight to accompany my brothers with the flocks. I brought him back a bad report about his other sons. Could I have possibly antagonized them any more? I was not on the next trip but was sent to check up on them. They were not happy to see me. As I came closer, I heard, "Here comes the dreamer." Then there was some barely audible mumbling and some sort of an angry disagreement. I gave them my usual cheery greeting and was promptly grabbed, stripped of my special robe and thrown into an empty cistern. When a caravan of traders came by, I was sold for 20 shekels, brought to Egypt and purchased by Potiphar, captain of Pharaoh's guard.

I feared Dad would die of despair when I did not return. How they broke it to him I only found out later, bringing back my shredded coat covered in blood. That nearly broke my heart for him! But I followed my father's example of perseverance and made the best of a bad deal. I rose in Potiphar's household to manager. The only problem was his amorous wife who kept making passes at me.

Finally, angry at my constant refusals, she grabbed my cloak and falsely accused me of attempted rape. I was whisked to Pharaoh's prison.

I quickly became a trustee and was asked by two of Pharaoh's incarcerated officials to interpret dreams. One of them had a dream that foretold release and reinstatement, the other told of execution. It was clearly interpretations coming from the LORD. I asked the first man to remember me to Pharaoh, but he forgot. Until, that is, when two years later Pharaoh had a dream. His wise men could not interpret it and the court was buzzing. The cupbearer suddenly remembered the inmate who interpreted dreams and I was cleaned up and brought to Pharaoh.

It went like this: Pharaoh said to me, "I had a dream, and no one can interpret it. But I have heard it said of you that when you hear a dream you can interpret it." "I cannot do it," I replied, "But God will give Pharaoh the answer he desires." It was actually a pretty obvious interpretation. I think the LORD must have blinded the wise men or they would have at least made a guess. It was seven fat cows eaten by seven skinny cows. Then seven fat heads of grain consumed by seven skinny heads. It was obviously seven years of bounty followed by seven years of famine. I made the interpretation, then suggested a plan. I obviously forgot that I was giving advice to the most powerful man on earth!

Would you believe it, he made me the prime minister, commissioned with collecting and storing grain during the bountiful years, then charged with selling during the famine. I may not be good with people, but I am phenomenal with numbers. I collected a huge surplus and when selling it, enriched the Pharaoh, first with the people's money, then their livestock, and when that ran out, their land and finally with their servitude. During that time, I also married and had two sons. I believe in your quaint language you might say, "Not bad for a geek."

We were getting buyers from other countries and in the second year of the famine 10 of my brothers showed up. They did not recognize me. This was too good to be true and I thought of the many plans for revenge I had considered over the years. I did not let on and spoke through a translator. I had to first find out how the family was doing, so I accused them of being spies and asked lots of questions. Did they have any more brothers? Was their father alive? When they told of one deceased brother and a still younger brother, I demanded that he be brought to prove the story. First, I required that they all stay in prison and one go back, then I changed it to one stay and the rest go back. Simeon volunteered. I insisted that if they did not bring their youngest brother, they would not see me again or the brother who stayed as a hostage. In fact, all their lives would be forfeit, I heard them mourning among themselves, sure that they were being punished by the LORD for what they did to the brother they sold -- me! I just about lost it several times!

And when they left, I arranged for their money to be put in the sacks of grain. I knew that would worry them. I was not surprised that they did not come right back. I knew that it would be difficult for our father to part with Benjamin, whose mother died when giving birth. I had momentary worries that I should not have made it so difficult for them. But when they came, it was bearing gifts and double the silver to make up for what had been returned to them in the sacks. Dad must have remembered how he tried to pacify Esau with gifts. My brothers told my steward about the extra silver and he assured them that payment had been received and their God must have given it to them.

When I saw Benjamin, I told my men to bring them to my house. When I greeted them, they presented the gifts. I asked about father. I asked if the young man was the brother they had told me about. Then Simeon was released to them and I had a table set for dinner. I arranged for them to be

seated according to age – which mystified them. I ate at a separate table but could see and hear them. I ordered Benjamin's portion to be five times larger. I had to step out of the chamber several times so they would not see me weeping.

When they left, again I had their money placed back in their sacks just like before and a silver cup placed in the bag of Benjamin. Before they got far, I had them chased and accused of stealing the cup. They were terrified and denied having taken the cup, rashly offering themselves as slaves and promising that the thief would die if the cup were found among them. Of course, the cup was in Benjamin's bag.

On return to the city, they threw themselves on the ground begging mercy for Benjamin and offering to take his place. Judah told of how difficult it had been getting father to agree to letting Benjamin go. This would kill their father if Benjamin did not return. Judah offered to remain as a slave. They all were overcome with sorrow and repentance. I was convinced. They all had changed.

I asked my stewards to leave the room. I questioned more about father and they must have thought I was about to strike them dead, Then I told them, "I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt! And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you." They couldn't believe it. I kept on talking. There would be five more years of famine. They must bring father and the whole household down to Egypt. They would be given the best land for their flocks. We were hugging and kissing and weeping. We made such a commotion that Pharaoh heard it and wondered what was happening.

Well, Pharaoh was thrilled for the chance to receive my father and sent carts to carry him and the whole household back. As they left, I could not resist telling my brothers, "Don't quarrel on the way." Pharaoh promised them the best land in Egypt. My father got a vision and a message from the LORD. "I am God, the God of your father. Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for I will make you into a great nation there."

It was celebration all around and the family lived in Goshen. Our father was honored by Pharaoh and father blessed the Pharaoh. After 17 years in Egypt, Jacob died and the entire family brought his body back to the family tomb near Mamre in Canaan. We were accompanied by a large contingent of Egyptian dignitaries. That caused quite a sensation in the neighborhood!

But after our father was buried, my brothers thought that now I would exact vengeance on them. Again, I had to reassure them, "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good."

Genesis 30 - 50