

Rabbi's Column

This week is my Bar Mitzvah portion. The Joseph story begins, with a slight detour into part of Judah's saga.

Here are a few of the lessons I have picked up over the years:

Competence in one field does not automatically translate into competence in all fields. Joseph dreamed true, yet had no clue how his actions affected his brothers.

Joseph is the only one in the entire Torah, and possibly the entire TaNaKH, who gets the big picture. Eventually he will tell the brothers that what they intended as harm to him was part of God's plan for the family's survival. Moses has to be constantly reminded that things will get worse before they get better.

If somebody in power over you is out to get you, there is a good chance they will succeed one way or another.

Other people will not always have your own best interest at heart, if your own best interest conflicts with their own best interest.

Joseph is called the righteous one. This shows that being righteous has nothing to do with never making a mistake. Neither does it have to do with requiring other people to change. It has to do with allowing other people to become better people, and not being too disappointed if they do not completely succeed.

You cannot be a righteous hermit. Righteousness requires the messiness of dealing with other human beings.

Grief does not follow a single schedule. Until Jacob knew that Joseph was indeed alive, everything was filtered through that loss.

It is very difficult to avoid parenting the way you were parented.

When you make a promise, keep it. Joseph could have easily returned to Jacob, telling him he could not find his brothers. He went out of his way to find people who could tell him where his brothers went.