

Rabbi's Column

This week's Torah portion is probably the one I have spent the most time with, as it is my Bar Mitzvah portion.

Joseph is complicated. He is both a spoiled brat and the most intelligent person in the neighborhood. The Rabbis considered him righteous, going so far as to call him "Joseph, the righteous one." Noah, whom the text considers righteous in his generation, does not get righteousness attached to his name on an ongoing basis. Why is Joseph considered righteous?

The answer is not completely found in this week's portion, so I will have more to say about it at a later time.

Within this week's portion, Joseph shows success in investigating the whereabouts of his brothers, in managing an Egyptian household and in running a prison for politically important prisoners from the inside. He graduates from having predictive dreams to learning how to interpret them when other people have them. This is only part of what indicates that he is more intelligent and capable than most other people around him.

Spoiler alert: God never talks directly to Joseph. Whatever he figures out, he does it on his own. Were his personal trials a preparation for saving the local area during a famine? He lets his brothers eventually know that such is the case. No other person with whom we might expect God to communicate figures this kind of stuff out without getting the clue first from God. Often they have to be reminded a few times that things could get worse before they get better, or that they should focus on what will eventually happen and not on what is happening now.

I hope that many of us can find hints of God within our lives without having to suffer like Joseph did first.