

Igbo Torah Thoughts

Parashah #10 Mikketz “At the end”

Genesis 41:-44:17, I Kings 3:15-4:1

Rabbi Yehudah “Tochukwu” ben Shomeyr

And Joseph saw his brethren, and he knew them, but made himself strange unto them, and spake roughly unto them; and he said unto them, Whence come ye? And they said, From the land of Canaan to buy food. And Joseph knew his brethren, but they knew not him. And Joseph remembered the dreams which he dreamed of them, and said unto them, Ye are spies; to see the nakedness of the land ye are come... And they knew not that Joseph understood them; for he spake unto them by an interpreter. And he turned himself about from them, and wept; and returned to them again, and communed with them, and took from them Simeon, and bound him before their eyes... Then Joseph could not refrain himself before all them that stood by him; and he cried, Cause every man to go out from me. And there stood no man with him, while Joseph made himself known unto his brethren. And he wept aloud: and the Egyptians and the house of Pharaoh heard. And Joseph said unto his brethren, I am Joseph; doth my father yet live? And his brethren could not answer him; for they were troubled at his presence. And Joseph said unto his brethren, Come near to me, I pray you. And they came near. And he said, I am Joseph your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt. Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life. – Gen. 42:7-9, 23-24, 45:1-5

Joseph, though his mother was the Semite Rachel, nonetheless was dark and became darker by being exposed to the harsh Egyptian sun as a slave and then eventually being appointed by Pharaoh as viceroy of Egypt, to the point that his very own brothers failed to recognize him and took him for a black Egyptian. It wasn't until he revealed himself to his brothers, likely by removing his Egyptian headgear to reveal his wavy Semitic hair, instead of tightly curly Hammitic/Egyptian hair, did they know it was really Joseph. Joseph had Ephraim and Manasseh by a black Egyptian woman (Gen. 41:45), thus Ephraim and Manasseh were black men.

Gen. 40-41, 42:9, I Kings 3:15

Like Israel, Igbos have a deeply rooted belief regarding the meaning of dreams; believing that they are from God (Chukwu Abiama), and that is one of the ways He speaks to and even warns His people. I have yet to meet a true Igbo who does not take dreams very seriously.

And they said one to another, We are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul, when he besought us, and we would not hear; therefore is this distress come upon us. And Reuben answered them, saying, Spake I not unto you, saying, Do not sin against the child; and ye would not hear? therefore, behold, also his blood is required... And he said unto his brethren, My money is restored; and, lo, it is even in my sack: and their heart failed them, and they were afraid, saying one to another, What is this that God hath done unto us? - Gen. 42:21-22, 28

In the text it is clear Joseph's brothers believed in Divine retribution for sin; that there is a consequence for every action, even if such divine retribution is delayed by years, it will eventually come if not repented and atoned for and this too is deep rooted in the Igbo psyche.

SHABBAT SHALOM! IGBO KWENU!

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