

## ORIGINAL JOSEPH'S HOUSE STORY

Joseph's story is found at the end of Genesis. We don't know for sure why the other sons of Jacob hated their brother Joseph. Perhaps it was because—in bringing his father a “bad report” about his brothers—Joseph had violated the brothers' implicit moral code; perhaps it was Joseph's insensitivity in reporting his dreams of ruling over his family; perhaps, it was merely the brothers' jealousy of their father's favorite. Whatever the reason, the brothers plotted to kill him. One, Reuben, staved off the murder by having Joseph thrown into a cistern and left to die, thinking to return later to save him. Another, Judah, convinced the brothers to sell Joseph into slavery in Egypt, thus—for the time being—saving Joseph's life.

In Egypt God was with Joseph and allowed him to prosper. Even when things seemed darkest (Joseph was thrown into jail because he had refused his owner's wife's advances), God stayed with him, giving him the gift of dream interpretation.

Ultimately, the Egyptian king had dreams he could not understand. Joseph was called and offered an interpretation that required the king to place an extraordinary trust in this imprisoned slave. Joseph, the rejected one, became second in power only to the king and given absolute economic authority to allocate production. He was responsible for storing the wealth of the land during seven fat years in order to prepare for seven lean years, which only he foresaw. We can only imagine how much hostility he generated as he forced the farmers and merchants to store their wealth uselessly during their prosperity.

But God had given Joseph a clear vision, allowing Egypt to survive the famine. And not only Egypt but Joseph's own family, Israel, came to be fed. Through his dreaming, the son who had been rejected saved his brothers and the entire people of God.

There is much richness in this story. We are reminded that it is the most hated and despised through whom God often chooses to save God's people. Like Joseph, homeless men with HIV disease are outcasts. In the Joseph story it doesn't seem to matter much whether Joseph is an outcast because of his own personal failings or because of the narrowness and wickedness of his brothers; whose “fault” it is seems strangely unimportant. Like Joseph, people with AIDS are the rejected ones, and that is the central theme.

Although Reuben and Judah provide for Joseph's ultimate rescue, they are, like most of us, hardly paragons of virtue. They act secretly, not even challenging the morality of their brothers' actions. Their contributions to Joseph's safety might seem to be marginal. But God uses puny efforts, anyway, to bring God's people to a place of safety.

Egypt is a land of wealth and prosperity. It is a land where the dominant consciousness of production and productivity reign. Yet no one in this successful realm can decipher God's message through the king's dream. It is the insight of Joseph, the marginalized one, the one who has been put out of mind, that the kingdom requires.

If the king had not listened, nothing would have come of it. Against all reason and likelihood, the king turns over the productivity of the kingdom to this dream ... and to the dreamer. The representative of the dominant consciousness hears the voice of the rejected one and through him the kingdom survives. And the story comes full circle when Israel comes to Egypt and even those who originally rejected the hated son are accepted as full family members, completely forgiven.

We envision Joseph's House as a place where the ostracized and hated of society are protected, where their dreams and their visions are nourished. As the years of American domination and plenty come to an end, an American famine is coming: The culture now needs the visions of those whom it has marginalized. We are hopeful that within community, dreams and visions will be mutually nurtured and offered back to the larger society.

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