

## A Muse: Vayigash

Traditionally, we view Joseph through the lens of the ethical/moral development of the nascent Jewish people. Joseph is Yoseph Hatzadik in our rabbinic literature, wronged by his brothers, tested by Potiphar's wife and because of his impeccable character rose to the second in command in Pharaoh's Egypt.

There is however another side to Joseph, Joseph the political person. It would appear that he was a natural survivor and one who had an instinctual affinity for the art of politics. Unlike the counselors and advisors of the Pharaoh who were "yes men" Joseph had little to lose by informing the Pharaoh that he was in for some very bad times. A savvy politician would understand the possibilities of acquiring unlimited power if he were to take advantage of the situation. Joseph, as a ruthless politician began setting up the process and preparing the groundwork for exploiting the situation to his benefit.

Preparing for the famine, Joseph prepares the country by stockpiling perishable goods, grain and other essential food stuffs. When the famine hits he sells the food for cash (Chapter 47:14) accumulating great wealth for the Pharaoh. After the money was depleted he began trading the grain for livestock (chapter 47:16-17). Once the livestock was depleted the Egyptians sold their land to the Pharaoh for food and in so doing indentured themselves as Pharaoh's property.

Joseph's policy of consolidating the power totally in the Pharaoh's hand became complete once he executed his final policy which as the text says removed the people from their ancestral lands. (Chapter 47:21-22) Joseph was very clever because the only ones that weren't dislocated were the priests who legitimized the divinity of the Pharaoh.

Joseph during his tenure managed to centralize the power, wealth, and property of the Egyptians; keep them dislocated and off the land and maintain his alliance with the

priests to insure his continued divine grace. Naturally, there was growing resentment to the fact that Joseph and the Pharaoh bested the people out of their wealth and land and waited till the opportunity presented itself. After Joseph and that generation died off we are told of a new Pharaoh who “knew not Joseph” (vayakom melech chadash al mitzrayim) and was intent on not only reversing the misfortunes of the Egyptians but taking revenge for what had happened to them under the rule of Joseph.