

# Erev Miketz 5779

## Dreams

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Shabbat Shalom! "As Gregor Samsa awoke one morning from uneasy dreams he found himself transformed in his bed into an enormous insect." These words are the opening sentence of the novel *Metamorphosis* by Franz Kafka (1883–1924), a German-speaking Prague Jewish author, widely regarded as one of the major figures of 20<sup>th</sup> century literature, whose work has been exploring themes of bizarre, absurd, surrealistic and existential dreams. I am coming to you from Kafka's hometown Prague, and want to testify that Kafka wasn't any fantasy writer, who invented the "non-existent". He simply described the reality of Prague. Now, you certainly want to ask me if I have ever experienced waking up as an enormous insect. Well, I will have to disappoint you, as this hasn't happened ... yet. But I can confirm that Prague is the city of dreams and sometimes you can hardly distinguish between them and reality. I believe that Rabbi Andrew can confirm that. My wife Judith and I came at the kind invitation of Rabbis Andrew and Aaron Goldstein to share with you our dream.

This week's Torah portion *Miketz*, in which we meet our forefather Joseph in Egypt, is also quite "Kafkaesque" with one exception, which is a happy ending. Pharaoh, Gregor Samsa alike, awoke one morning from uneasy dreams about seven fat cows and seven gaunt cows, which ate up the fat cows, and seven good ears of grain and seven thin ears of grain, which swallowed up the good ears of grain. He doesn't quite understand what's going on. Joseph, who was put to prison, is an innocent victim of fabricated accusations like his famous namesake Joseph K. by Kafka. Pharaoh's chief butler knows that Joseph is a skilful interpreter of dreams and recommends Pharaoh to turn to him. Joseph knows that his answer to Pharaoh will decide not only his own destiny, but also about the life and death of thousands of human beings in the kingdom. Joseph meets Pharaoh and, unlike Kafka's figures, succeeds... not only in interpreting his dreams, but also transforming their message into reality and motivating others to act. In this way, Joseph's dreams saved the lives of thousands before dying of hunger.

When I met Rabbi Andrew Goldstein and his wife Sharon years ago, I was immensely impressed by their strong attachment to Czech Jewry. I found out that there was one dream

my wife and I share with Sharon and Rabbi Andrew. It is the dream of Rabbi Richard Feder. He was born in the small Czech town Václavice in 1875, and after having completed his rabbinical studies in Vienna, served as a rabbi for Czech Jewish communities. He finally retired in 1938. Following the Nazi occupation, he tried to rescue the entire Jewish population of his community in Kolín, sadly in vain. In 1942, when he was 66 years old, he and his entire family were transported to Terezin. Other survivors remembered his life optimism as he didn't hesitate to officiate at weddings, Bat and Bar Mitzvah ceremonies and maintain other aspect of Jewish religious and social life even in the harsh conditions of Terezin. Those who remember him say that Richard Feder had been able to create dreams for those who had nothing but nightmares and save their lives by one sentence. When desperate people came to him and were asking when they would go home, he answered: "When chestnut trees will be in bloom." At the end of the war, he was the only one who survived. He lost his wife, his sons and daughter, daughter-in-law, son-in-law, his grandchildren. Despite this, he carried on performing his rabbinic mission until his death at the age of 95.

When you visit the Czech Republic between April and June, you will find its streets decorated with beautiful white chestnut blossoms, which resemble magnificent candlesticks. Thanks to Feder, this vision of blossoming and growth stayed in the dreams of Czech Jews until nowadays. These blooms symbolise our children, the next generation, who will have the chance to grow up and live their Judaism in a new community that we decided to establish in Prague. Thanks to your special relationship to the Czech Republic, we would like to embark on this journey together with you.

The Talmud teaches the following prayer: "Master of the Universe, I am Yours and my dreams are Yours. I dreamed a dream and do not know what it is. Whether I have dreamt of myself, whether my friends have dreamed of me or whether I have dreamed of others, if the dreams are good, strengthen them and reinforce them like the dreams of Joseph. ... Transform all my dreams for the best." (Berakhot 55b) I hope that one morning I will wake up in the morning and will see our community in bloom and our dream fulfilled.

Ken yehi ratzon. Ve'nomar: Amen.