



*Character Above All*, Doris Goodwin Kearns describes Franklin Delano Roosevelt as this type of leader; FDR was a confident problem-solver and decision-maker. Frances Perkins, FDR's Secretary of Labor, said that FDR's "capacity to inspire and encourage those around him to do tough, confused and practically impossible jobs was without dispute." After she met with the President, Perkins did not always have a ready solution to a problem but, Goodwin Kearns describes, she felt "more cheerful, more determined, stronger than she had felt when she went into the room."

Eleanor said this of her husband: "I have never known a man who gave one a greater sense of security. I never heard him say there was a problem that he thought it was impossible for human beings to solve." This is the first quote to appear at the FDR Memorial in Washington, DC. In his four terms as President, FDR faced problems on the national and international world stage that may have toppled those less self-assured. FDR's relationship to the Jewish community was, of course, more complex and has been discussed at length in Richard Breitman and Allan J. Lichtman's National Jewish Book Award finalist, *FDR and the Jews*, and more recently Raphael Medo's book *The Jews Should Keep Quiet: Franklin D. Roosevelt, Rabbi Stephen S. Wise, and the Holocaust*.

*Parshat Miketz*, this week's Torah reading, offers us a glimpse of this problem-solving capacity in Joseph. Joseph was a dreamer, but his salvation and that of his family actually came through dream interpretation. No one else had the confidence, expertise, or temerity to help Pharaoh understand his inner confusion. "And Pharaoh said to Joseph, 'I have had a dream, but no one can interpret it. Now I have heard it said of you that for you to hear a dream (*tishma halom*) is to tell its meaning'" (Gen. 41:15).

Word traveled quickly about Joseph's abilities. Just hearing a dream revealed its significance. Rashi focuses on the verb to hear or to listen, translating it as "to pay attention." The word implies more than simple hearing; it suggests listening for understanding. Rashi cites two other

prooftexts to support his reading, Genesis 42:23 and Deuteronomy 28:49. Seforno suggests that Joseph did not guess or speculate but thought carefully about Pharaoh's words, the context in which they were said, and their larger import and significance. Joseph interpreted Pharaoh's dream on a national economic scale, thinking about the dream politically rather than personally.

Joseph's talent makes an appearance in another story about the ruler of a large empire and a Jewish courtier: Nebuchadnezzar and Daniel. Chapter four of the book of Daniel opens with Nebuchadnezzar in a similar state to Pharaoh of confusion and fear: "I had a dream that frightened me, and my thoughts in bed and the vision of my mind alarmed me. I gave an order to bring all the wise men of Babylon before me to let me know the meaning of the dream" (Dan. 4:2-3). Nebuchadnezzar was desperate to have someone explain his own mind to him. When none of his own dream interpreters, magicians, or exorcists could help, he turned to Daniel, regarding him as a person of deep intelligence and intuition. He said to him, "Tell me the meaning of my dream before I die."

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