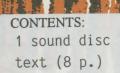
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Joseph AND HIS BROTHERS

from "In the Beginning" by Sholem Asch

narrated by Arna Bontemps



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Joseph and His Brothers

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Joseph AND HIS BROTHERS from "In the Beginning"

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#### JOSEPH AND HIS BROTHERS

Jacob loved Joseph the best of all his twelve sons. Joseph's brothers had to do heavy work and look after the flocks the whole day long, while Joseph stayed at home with his father. Jacob gave him beautiful silken garments, but the other sons had to wear the usual woolen clothing. So Joseph grew haughty and very proud toward his brothers. He kept himself aloof from them, and preferred to stay with the children of Bilha, his mother's maid, because they always flattered him. Moreover, his brothers knew that he carried evil gossip about them to their father; so they hated him and bore malice in their hearts toward him.

One fine morning Joseph said to his brothers:

"Last night I had a remarkable dream. I dreamed that we all had been binding sheaves in the field, and my sheaf arose and stood up high, but your sheaves bowed down before it."

Another time he came to his brothers and told them he had dreamed that the sun, the moon and eleven stars bowed themselves before him, and that he thought it meant his father and mother and his eleven brothers.

Then Jacob grew angry, he scolded Joseph for such overbearing words, and said:

"What kind of talk is this? It may come to pass that I and your brothers shall bow down before you. But certainly not your Mother! For she is dead!"

But in his heart he was very happy over his dream and wished it might be fulfilled, for he loved Joseph fervently. But the brothers hated Joseph more than ever before, they laughed and jeered at him, and called him the dreamer.

It happened once that they did not come home for a long time. Then Jacob was filled with anxiety over them and said to Joseph:

"Go, my son, and inquire after your brothers. I should like to know also how the sheep are coming along."

So Joseph arose and went to search for his brothers and he found them there. When the brothers saw Joseph coming toward them, they said to one another:

"Here comes that dreamer. We are all alone with him here and we'll now get even with him."

They decided to kill him.

Reuben however had pity on Joseph; he wanted to save him from the hands of his brothers and said:

"Brothers, we do not want to murder him. It would be better for us to throw him into a pit. Our hands shall then not be stained with his blood." This advice pleased the brothers very much and they decided to follow it. When Joseph came, they took him into their midst, stripped off his silken coat, and threw him into a pit. The pit was deep, but it had no water in it. Joseph only hurt himself in falling, but he remained alive.

One of the brothers had to go every day to their father to look after him. When Reuben's turn came, he wanted to take Joseph out of the pit and carry him away; however, he did not succeed with this plan for his brothers surrounded the pit and kept watch there day and night. And Reuben had to go to his father without Joseph. After Reuben had gone away, they all sat down around the pit, at and drank and paid no attention to Joseph, who lay bruised at the bottom of the pit, and was crying bitterly.

Then a caravan came along the way. They were merchants from Gilead who carried spices, balm and myrrh upon their camels and were going down to Egypt. And Judah said to his brothers:

"Brothers, what good will it do us if we kill Joseph and stain our hands with his blood? It will be better for us to sell him to these people."

That contented the brothers. They called to the merchants, pulled Joseph out of the pit and offered him for sale.

"What price do you demand?" asked the merchants.

"Twenty pieces of silver," answered the brothers.

Then the merchants counted out the required price and took Joseph along with them to Egypt. The brothers divided the money among themselves.

In the meantime, Reuben came back, and when he found that Joseph was no longer in the pit he was filled with despair and cried out:

"Brothers, what have you done? The boy is no longer here! Where shall I go? What can I say to our father?"

Then the brothers went off and killed a kid; with their own teeth they tore Joseph's coat to pieces and dipped it in the animal's blood.

The father had been standing a long time at the window, watching restlessly for his sons, because his heart told him something had gone wrong. When they came, he searched among them for Joseph, but found him not. Then the sons showed him the bloody rags, and said that Joseph must have been torn to pieces by wild animals. When Jacob heard this he tore his garments, put on sackcloth and cried like a little child. Then the sons were very sorry over their wicked deed; but they could not tell their father the truth because they had previously given one another the promise not to tell the secret. They threw themselves on their knees before him, kissed his hands and tried to comfort him. But Jacob did not hear their consoling words, because his heart was full of sorrow. For days and nights he sat on the ground and wept for his favorite son.

#### JOSEPH IN EGYPT

Listen now to what in the meantime happened to Joseph. The merchants from Gilead took him to Egypt and offered him for sale in the market-place. Potiphar, the Master of the Horse to the King of Egypt bought Joseph as a slave. Joseph went to Potiphar's house and at first was a simple servant. That was very hard for him because his father had never made him work. But he pulled himself together, was industrious, willing and polite, so that he soon won the approval of his master and received advancement. It was not long until Potiphar noticed how smart and ready Joseph was, and also that he understood a great deal which the others did not know; so he gave him his complete confidence. He delivered to him the keys of his treasury, and made him overseer of his entire household.

But Joseph was such a handsome young man that every one was astonished at his good looks. Once Potiphar's wife told her women-friends that she had a servant of unusual beauty. She called Joseph into the room. Joseph entered and he was so handsome that the women could not speak for amazement.

Joseph grew very proud and conceited and soon he had nothing in his mind but dress and vanity. Also he no longer thought of his sorrowing father. Joseph's behavior displeased the dear Lord, and He decided to punish him for his conceit and lack of affection. He allowed Potiphar's wife to be enkindled with love for Joseph. She urged him to kill Potiphar and take her for his wife. But Joseph refused to do this because he was an honest young man and faithful to his master.

"How can I betray my lord?" he said to Potiphar's wife. "He has conferred so much favor upon me and has made me overseer of his whole house, and has given his possessions into my care. Shall this then be my thanks? No, I will not do it!"

Then Potiphar's wife grew very afraid that Joseph would betray her to her husband, so she went in secret to Potiphar and told him that his servant Joseph was in love with her and wanted to have her for his wife; that he tried to persuade her that she should kill her husband. With these wicked words she poisoned Potiphar's mind, and he ordered Joseph thrown into prison. Thus was Joseph punished by the Lord.

### JOSEPH IN PRISON

When Joseph sat in prison, God again bestowed His mercy upon him. The keeper of the dungeon found pleasure in him and put him in charge of the prisoners. It happened at the same time that the chief baker and the chief cupbearer of King Pharaoh were serving sentences in prison for having given offense to the King. The baker was being punished because three dead flies had been found in the bread which was intended for the royal table; and the cupbearer because, in the goblet which he had handed to the king, three flies had likewise been found.

As Joseph entered their cell one morning he saw that they both were very sad; so he asked:

"Why are you so sorrowful?"

And they answered:

"We have had unusual dreams and we do not know what they mean."

"Well," said Joseph, "Tell me your dreams, perhaps I can explain them to you."

Then the cupbearer began thus:

"I dreamed that I stood before a grape-vine. The vine had three branches, they grew and blossomed and their clusters of grapes ripened. But I held Pharaoh's goblet in my hand, took the grapes and pressed them into the cup and I gave it to Pharaoh."

Then Joseph said to him:

"The three branches are three days. In three days Pharaoh will deliver you from prison and will put you back in your former office. But when you come before Pharaoh think of me, and attend to it that I too am set free, for I was stolen away in secret from the land of the Jews and I have done no wrong here; in spite of that I have been imprisoned."

When the baker heard how well Joseph had interpreted the dream of the cupbearer, he began also to tell his:

"I dreamed that I was carrying three baskets of baked goods on my head, and in the uppermost one was the best and finest things that were baked. Then a flock of birds came flying and ate up everything that was in the basket."

Thereupon Joseph said:

"The three baskets mean likewise three days. In three days Pharaoh will have you hanged on a gallows and the birds will devour your body."

Three days later Pharaoh celebrated his birthday, and he gave a great feast to his laborers and servants. The cupbearer and the baker were taken out of the prison and they were tried in public. The cupbearer had to defend himself first. He said:

"In the moment when the unfortunate accident happened, I was holding the cup in one hand and pouring in the wine with the other. So I could not prevent the flies from falling into the cup."

This explanation was very satisfactory to Pharaoh. They freed the cupbearer of the crime and put him back in his same office. Then the chief baker's turn came. He, however, could not plead anything as an excuse, for the flies had fallen into the dough while he was kneading it, so that he might have been able to take them out. Hence his guilt was clear and he was condemned to death. On the very same day Pharaoh had him hanged on the gallows and the birds ate up his body. So both dreams were fulfilled as Joseph had interpreted them.

#### JOSEPH IS MADE RULER OVER

#### EGYPT

Two years later it happened that Pharaoh had a dream: he stood by the river Nile and saw seven cows come up out of the water; they were fat and fine looking, and they went into the grass to graze. After them he saw again seven other cows come up out of the same water; they were ugly and very thin. The lean cows ran after the others, fell upon them and ate them completely up. But strange to say: it could not be noticed. For afterwards they remained just as thin as before.

Then Pharaoh awoke. But he soon fell into another deep sleep. He dreamed again, and saw seven ears of corn which were full and fine-grained, and they grew up out of one stalk. And after that he saw seven ears which were parched and empty. And behold! the poor ears devoured the thick full ones; but no one could notice it for they stayed just as withered as before.

Pharaoh awoke and realized that this also had been a dream. But he could not fall asleep again because the dreams gave him no peace. He tried as hard as he could, but he did not know how to explain them.

When it was morning, Pharaoh sent his people after the great fortune-tellers of the land and the interpreters of dreams; and when they came he related his dreams to them and begged them to explain their meaning. They listened to him carefully, shook their wise heads and were silent for a long time. Then they did much debating, and each one said something different. One thought the seven fat cows meant seven daughters who were to be born to Pharaoh, and that the seven lean ones indicated that these daughters should die. Another one asserted, on the other hand, that the seven fat cows meant seven battles which Pharaoh was to win, the seven thin ones, seven battles which he would lose. But then a third one asked how they could explain that the seven fat cows were eaten up by the seven thin ones, and no one knew how to answer him.

All of these interpretations displeased Pharaoh. He sent all the wise men away and fell into deep melancholy.

Then the chief cupbearer remembered the young Hebrew Joseph who was still in prison and he went to Pharaoh, threw himself on his knees before him and said:

"My great King, I remember today my sins. Pharaoh was once very angry with his servant and had me thrown into prison together with the chief baker. We dreamed in the same night very unusual things and we did not know how to explain them. At the same time a Hebrew youth, servant to the king's Master of the Horse, was serving sentence in prison. We told our dreams to him, and just as he explained them to us, so have they also come to pass."

When Pharaoh heard these words, he at once gave the order to free Joseph from his imprisonment, and to lead him before his presence. So Joseph was brought out of the prison. He was washed, dressed in other clothing and taken in unto Pharaoh. The king sat upon his golden throne, and around him the great and the wise men of the land were assembled. Pharaoh's throne had seventy steps. On the first step stood those wise ones who knew only one language; upon the second, those who knew two languages, and so it went on to the last step. Upon the seventieth step Pharaoh sat alone, because he was the only one who understood all seventy languages which are spoken in the world. When Joseph appeared before Pharaoh, the wise men asked him:

"Tell us, how many languages do you understand so that we may assign you your place?"

"I must stand on the seventieth step," replied Joseph, "for I understand seventy languages."

And Joseph spoke the truth, for in the night an angel had come to him and had taught him all seventy tongues.

The king then told him his dream and begged him to intrepret it to him. ---Joseph meditated a long while; then he said:

"Mighty Pharaoh! It belongs to God alone to interpret your dream for you."

"Both of Pharaoh's dreams have the same meaning. God is making known to Pharaoh what He intends to do. The seven fat cows are seven good years just the same as the seven full ears of corn. The seven lean cows, however, are seven bad years, just like the seven parched ears. At first seven years of plenty will come to the land of Egypt, and the land will bear rich fruits and will yield good harvests. After that, there will follow seven years of famine which will lay waste the land and consume the wealth. And because Pharaoh has dreamed this dream twice it is a sign that God has definitely settled upon this plan and that it will soon come to pass." And Joseph advised Pharaoh to select a wise and sensible man, who should take care that during the seven years of plenty a supply of grain should be stored up in the granaries of Egypt for the seven years of famine.

These words pleased Pharaoh and all the people assembled with him and they all agreed together that Joseph himself was the wisest and most sensible man in the land. The king raised him to be the first man in Egypt and said to him:

"From now on you shall stand over every one who is in my house. All the people shall obey you; only the throne shall exalt me above you."

When he had thus spoken, he took the ring from his own hand and placed it on Joseph's finger, he hung a golden chain around his neck, and presented him with magnificent garments. Then he had him seated in his second chariot and driven through all the streets of the city; before him went the cry: "This man is ruler of the land."

Joseph was only thirty years old when he came into this honor and was made to rule over all Egypt. Soon he married a royal princess and his wife gave him two sons. He named the elder Manasseh, which means: "God has blessed me for all the wrongs I have suffered." To the second he gave the name Ephraim, which means: "God has made me to be great in the land of my affliction."

#### THE BROTHERS IN EGYPT

Everything came to pass exactly as Joseph had prophesied. The next seven years were rich and fruitful, and throughout the whole kingdom the earth gave fruit in great abundance. Joseph sent forth the command that all grain should be collected in Pharaoh's storehouses, and so much was stored up that it could no longer be measured.

But the seven years of plenty came to an end and the time of the famine set in. The earth was dry. If people sowed seed in the soil, the wind carried the seed away, and the earth yielded nothing. The trees were stripped of leaves and there was no fruit in all the land.

All the people suffered hunger; they moaned and cried out to Pharaoh and begged him for bread. Pharaoh said to the Egyptians: "Go unto Joseph, and do what he tells you to do." Then they all came to Joseph. And Joseph opened the storehouses of the land and sold grain to the Egyptians at a low cost.

But the famine raged not only in Egypt,---it spread over all lands, so that people everywhere suffered hunger. Soon people far and wide learned that there was a wise man in Egypt who in the seven years of plenty had collected a great deal of grain, had piled it up in storehouses, and was now selling it. Then they arose and went to Egypt, in order to get grain there for themselves.

The land of Canaan also, where Jacob lived with his children, was suffering from the famine, and the time was drawing near when there would be nothing more left to eat. One day Jacob said to his sons:

"I hear that in the land of Egypt there is cheap grain for sale. Do not tarry but go at once, for otherwise all of us here will starve to death."

Then they took big sacks and plenty of money with them and departed for Egypt.

Jacob sent ten of his sons to Egypt, but Benjamin, Joseph's brother, he kept at home because he was afraid that some accident might happen to him on the way. Also he did not want to allow him to go away from him because, after Joseph, he loved him the best of all his sons, and could not live without him, for of course Benjamin was also his beloved Rachel's son.

But Joseph knew that in the land of Canaan, also, there was no bread, and he thought to himself that his brothers would come to Egypt in order to buy grain. He issued a command by which every stranger who wished to come into the city was compelled to give a ticket upon which his name was written. At nightfall all the tickets were brought to him in his home, because he wanted to find out if his brothers were not among the new arrivals. And one fine day he read upon a ticket: "Reuben, the son of Jacob, has come into

the city through the South gate." Then again on another ticket: "Simeon, the son of Jacob, came into the city through the North gate." Thus he found all the ten tickets of his ten brothers, who each had arrived through a different gate because they did not want to cause any sensation. Then he ordered all the granaries locked, except just a single one, and at this one Joseph himself stood to give out the grain.

It was not long until the sons of Jacob came with their camels. Joseph recognized them at once, and his heart began to beat; but he controlled himself, acted like a stranger to them, and asked in a stern voice:

"Who are you?"

And they answered:

"We have come from the land of Canaan to buy grain."

But Joseph said to them:

 $^{\prime\prime}\mathrm{You}$  are spies, and you have come to find out where the land is open.  $^{\prime\prime}$ 

So the brothers answered:

"No, gracious lord, we are not spies. We are twelve sons of an honest old man. The youngest has stayed at home with our father. And one is no longer with us."

But Joseph asked:

"And what happened to your brother of whom you say that he is no longer with you?"

"He is dead, " they answered him

Then Joseph turned to his servants and said:

"Give me my magic cup."

And they brought it to him. It was however just a very ordinary cup. He took it in his hand, struck against it, then listened carefully a while to the sound and said:

"What you say is a lie, for my magic cup tells me that your brother lives; but you sold him for twenty pieces of silver. Is that true?"

Then they dropped their heads very low and were silent.

But Joseph said:

"Fill your sacks with grain, go home to your father and bring me back your youngest brother. One of you I will hold here as a pledge, so that you do what I tell you. Bring him with you that I may see if you have spoken the truth, and then I will allow you to depart in peace."

He demanded this, because he wanted to see his brother Benjamin.

Then Jacob's sons said to one another:

"Now the punishment is falling upon us for having sinned against our brother Joseph. We paid no attention to his tears and had no pity upon him. We sold him like an animal to a strange people. It serves us right that we are to be punished."

When Joseph heard these words he could no longer control his emotion, tears filled his eyes, so that he had to turn away for fear some one would notice. Then again he pulled himself together and had Simeon seized, for he wanted to keep him as a pledge. Thereupon he gave the command that the brothers' sacks should be filled with grain and that their money with which they had paid for the grain should be placed again in the sacks. He also ordered food and drink to be given them to take along on their journey. The brothers loaded the sacks upon their camels and rode away. It was not long until they arrived at a place of shelter. There one of them opened up his sack, to take out some food for the camels, and he found the money lying on the top. He was very much astonished at that, ran in haste to his brothers and told them about it. They were greatly frightened, because they did not know who could have done such a thing, and they felt very anxious for fear they would be blamed in Egypt for being robbers.

# THE RETURN OF THE BROTHERS TO CANAAN

When Joseph's brothers returned home, they told their father all that had happened to them in Egypt. They spoke of the great man who had treated them so ill and had accused them of being spies, of Simeon who had stayed behind chained in a prison, and finally of the man's request that Benjamin should be brought to Egypt. Jacob listened to them silently, but when they had got to the end of their story he said:

"Let things happen as they may -- I will not give Benjamin to you. Rachel gave me only two children, one of them I lost years ago, and now shall the other be taken from me? No, I will not let him go!"

Not long afterwards, however, all the grain was eaten up and a new supply had to be obtained. Then Jacob again spoke to his sons:

"How did the man happen to say to you that you had one other brother?"

And they answered him:

"We did not tell him about it, but he knew it himself, because he owned a magic cup which told him everything he wanted to know. Hence we had to tell him so that he would see we were speaking the truth."

Then Judah stepped up to his father and said:

"Father, give Benjamin into my keeping, I will answer to you for him with my life. Demand him again from my hands. Without him I will not come into your presence."

When Jacob saw that he could rely upon Judah, because Judah was the wisest and strongest of his sons he entrusted Benjamin to him. He gave them presents to take with them for the great man in Egypt, and he bestowed upon them his fatherly blessing. And they arose and set out with their brother Benjamin for Egypt.

### BENJAMIN IN EGYPT

One fine day Joseph saw from afar his brothers arriving. So he ordered sheep to be killed and a special meal to be prepared, for he wanted to receive them in splendor. But the brothers still were constantly afraid that they might be accused in Egypt of robbery, and they said to the servants that Joseph sent out to meet them:

"We found in our sacks the money with which we had paid for the grain, and we have brought it back to you."

Thereupon Joseph's servants answered them:

"You needn't worry yourselves about that. We are to lead you to Joseph."

Then the servants washed their hands and feet for them, dressed them in fresh clothes and took them to Joseph. He welcomed them heartily and asked:

"How is your old father getting along? Is he still living?"

And they answered:

"Yes, he is living; he sent you his greetings and told us to give you these gifts."  $\!\!\!\!$ 

Joseph was very pleased and thanked them for their father's presents. Suddenly he saw Benjamin standing among his brothers and asked:

"Is this your youngest brother?" And when he heard it was Benjamin he was so deeply moved that he had to go out of the room quickly, so that no one would notice. After a while he grew calm and went back to his brothers; he took the magic cup in his hand, struck against it, listened to the sound and said:

"My magic cup tells me that Reuben is the oldest one among you, therefore he shall be seated at the head of the table. Simeon is the second," and so he went on telling all his brothers their ages and seating each of them in his turn. They then ate and drank with Joseph, but did not yet know that he was their brother.

#### JOSEPH MAKES HIMSELF KNOWN

#### TO HIS BROTHERS

As the hour approached when the brothers wished to return home with their newly bought grain, Joseph ordered his people to put the money again into their sacks; but in Benjamin's sack he commanded them to put his magic cup. As the day began to dawn, Joseph's brothers loaded all their goods upon the camels, and set out cheerfully on their way to Canaan.

They had not gone very far when Joseph's servants overtook them and said to them:

"Our master ordered us to hurry after you and to tell you that you have returned good with evil. He invited you to eat with him, entertained you as guests and gave presents to you, but you have robbed him and have taken from him his magic silver cup.

The brothers were very deeply grieved at this and answered only:

"Look in our sacks, and whichever one among us you find has the cup, that one shall be put to death; and the rest of us you shall make your slaves."

They jumped from their camels, placed their sacks on the earth, and each man opened his own. Joseph's servants searched through the sacks and found the cup in Benjamin's. When the brothers saw this, they tore their clothes in despair. Then they loaded their sacks on the camels again, followed by Joseph's servants back into the city and soon appeared once more before Joseph.

"How could you do it?" he asked the men. "Did you not know that a man like me would soon find it out?"

And they answered:

"Master, what shall we say to you? You are just and fair, and we have all done wrong; we are willing to be your servants."

But Joseph said:

"Only the one among you in whose sack the cup was found shall be my servant; the rest of you may go your way in peace."

Then Judah stepped up to Joseph and said:

"Master, you asked us if we had a father and brothers. We then told you we had an aged father and a very young brother, who is his favorite son because he is the only one left to him by his dead wife Rachel. He loves the boy fervently, and his heart is set upon him. You demanded that we should bring the boy to you. But our father would not give him up until I pledged my own life for my brother. Only then, and with a heavy heart, did he let him go. Now, when we are ready to return home, you wish to hold him here. But if we go back to our father without the boy, he will die of grief. If our brother has stolen, let me bear his punishment, but give him again his freedom."

The Joseph was no longer able to control himself. He ordered all his servants to leave the room, and when he was left alone with his brothers he cried out to them:

"You told me that your brother Joseph was dead. He is not dead, he lives and you shall see him." And as he noticed how pale the brothers grew with fright, he continued:

"Do you then not recognize your brother Joseph? Look at me very carefully, for I am he whom you sold into Egypt. Listen and I will speak in Hebrew with you. Do not be afraid, but come nearer to me that I may embrace you."

And he embraced all his brothers. Benjamin, however, fell into his arms and wept for joy. Then he gave them beautiful gifts, to Benjamin the most beautiful of all. Finally he turned to Judah and said:

"Judah! I know that you persuaded your brothers to sell me into the land of Egypt. But do not be frightened, for it was God's will, so that I might save the world from famine. Go to our father and bring him here. From now on, you shall live with me in my palaces and gardens, for I am the greatest man in Egypt after Pharaoh."

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