The Global Day of Jewish Learning November 12, 2017

Source sheet for:
“A Beautiful Man?” Joseph and the Character of Masculinity in Judaism and Islam
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“XVI. BEAUTY Beauty (unlike ugliness) cannot really be explained: in each part of the body it stands out, repeats itself, but it does not describe itself. Like a god (and as empty), it can only say: I am what I am. The discourse, then, can do no more than assert the perfection of each detail and refer "the remainder" to the code underlying all beauty: Art. In other words, beauty cannot assert itself save in the form of a citation: that Marianina resembles the sultan's daughter is the only way something can be said about her beauty; it derives from its Model not only beauty but also language; left on its own, deprived of any anterior code, beauty would be mute. Every direct predicate is denied it; the only feasible predicates are either tautology (a perfectly oval face) or simile (lovely as a Raphael Madonna like dream in stone, etc.); thus, beauty is referred to an infinity of codes: lovely as Venus? But Venus lovely as what? As herself? As Marianina?"

2. Genesis 39:6 Establishing Joseph’s beauty
He left all that he had in Joseph's hands and, with him there, he paid attention to nothing save the food that he ate. Now Joseph was well built and handsome.

3. Genesis 39:10-12 “Not a man was in the house”
As she spoke to Joseph day after day, he did not listen to her to lie beside her or be with her. Now it happened one day that he went into the house to do his work, and none of the men of the household was there inside. She caught him by his garment, saying, "Lie with me!" And he left his garment in her hand and fled, and went outside."

4. Not a Man in the Qu’ran Sura 12:31
[12:30] Some women in the city gossiped: "The governor's wife is trying to seduce her servant. She is deeply in love with him. We see that she has gone astray."
[12:31] When she heard of their gossip, she invited them, prepared for them a comfortable place, and gave each of them a knife. She then said to him, "Enter their room." When they saw him, they so admired him, that they cut their hands.* They said, "Glory be to GOD, this is not a man; this is an honorable angel."

5. Genesis 37:2 Joseph is a “lad”
These are the generations of Jacob. Joseph, being seventeen years old was feeding the flock with his brethren, being still a lad even with the sons of Bilhah, and with the sons of Zilpah, his father’s wives; and Joseph brought evil report of them unto their father.
6. Genesis Rabbah 84:7 (17 is too old to be called “a lad.”)
“Joseph, being seventeen years old, etc. He was seventeen years old, yet you say, being still a lad! It means however that he behaved like a boy pencilling his eyes, curling his hair, and lifting his heels.”

Coats and Tales

7. Genesis 37:3-8 Joseph’s coat’s first appearance, his dreams, and why he is hated by his brothers
3Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age; and he made him a coat of many colors. 4And when his brethren saw that their father loved him more than all his brethren, they hated him, and could not speak peaceably unto him. 5And Joseph dreamed a dream, and he told it to his brethren; and they hated him yet the more. 6And he said unto them: ‘Hear, I pray you, this dream which I have dreamed: 7for, behold, we were binding sheaves in the field, and, lo, my sheaf arose, and also stood upright; and, behold, your sheaves came round about, and bowed down to my sheaf.’ 8And his brethren said to him: ‘Shalt thou indeed reign over us? or shalt thou indeed have dominion over us?’ And they hated him yet the more for his dreams, and for his words.

8. Genesis 37:31-35 Joseph’s bloody, torn coat
31Then they took Joseph’s tunic, slaughtered a kid, and dipped the tunic in the blood. 32They had the ornamented tunic taken to their father, and they said, “We found this. Please examine it; is it your son’s tunic or not?” 33He recognized it, and said, “My son’s tunic! A savage beast devoured him! Joseph was torn by a beast!” 34Jacob rent his clothes, put sackcloth on his loins, and observed mourning for his son many days. 35All his sons and daughters sought to comfort him; but he refused to be comforted, saying, “No, I will go down mourning to my son in Sheol.” Thus his father bewailed him.

9. Genesis 39:12-17 The third coat
12. She caught him by his garment, saying, ”Lie with me!” And he left his garment in her hand and fled, and went outside. 13When she saw that he had left his garment in her hand and had fled outside, 14she called to the men of her household and said to them, ”See, he has brought in a Hebrew to us to make sport of us; he came in to me to lie with me, and I screamed. 14she called to the men of her household and said to them, ”See, he has brought in a Hebrew to us to make sport of us; he came in to me to lie with me, and I screamed. 15“When he heard that I raised my voice and screamed, he left his garment beside me and fled and went outside.” 16So she left his garment beside her until his master came home. 17Then she spoke to him with these words, ”The Hebrew slave, whom you brought to us, came in to me to make sport of me.
10. Genesis Rabbah 87:6 What the Midrash thinks of this!

5. A matron asked R. Jose: “Is it possible that Joseph at seventeen years of age, with all the hot blood of youth, could act thus?” Thereupon he produced the Book of Genesis and read the stories of Rueben and Judah. If Scripture did not suppress aught in the case of these, who were older and in their father’s home, how much more in the case of Joseph, who was younger and his own master.

(Genesis Rabbah, and a footnote in the Soncino translation explains: “he was impotent.”)

Midrash Rabbah to Genesis 87:7. Using the midrashic technique of punning, Rabbi Samuel suggests that Joseph went in to sin, with his bow ("keshet") drawn, but after seeing a vision of his father, the bow relaxed ("kasheh"—i.e., lost its hardness). When Potiphar’s wife tried to seduce Jacob, he was interested but “upon inspection, he did not find himself a man.”

The Gemara explains: What is the situation where Joseph sanctified God’s name in private? As it is written: “And it came to pass on a certain day, when he went into the house to do his work” (Genesis 39:11). Rabbi Yoḥanan says: This teaches that both Joseph and Potiphar’s wife stayed in the house, as they intended to perform a matter of sin. With regard to the phrase “when he went into the house to do his work,” Rav and Shmuel engage in a dispute with regard to its meaning. One says: It means that he went into the house to do his work, literally. And one says: He entered the house in order to fulfill his sexual needs with her.

The verse continues: “And there was none of the men of the house there within” (Genesis 39:11). The Gemara asks: Is it possible that in such a large and important house like the house of that wicked man that no one was in there? The school of Rabbi Yishmael taught: That day was their festival day and they all went to their house of idol worship; and she told them that she was sick and could not go, as she said to herself: I have no day on which Joseph will attend to me like this day.
The verse states: “And she caught him by his garment, saying: Lie with me” (Genesis 39:12). At that moment his father’s image [deyokeno] came and appeared to him in the window. The image said to him: Joseph, the names of your brothers are destined to be written on the stones of the ephod, and you are to be included among them. Do you desire your name to be erased from among them, and to be called an associate [ro’eh] of promiscuous women? As it is written: “But he who keeps company with harlots wastes his riches” (Proverbs 29:3), as he loses his honor, which is more valuable than wealth.

**Genesis 49:24**

Yet his bow stayed taut, And his arms were made firm By the hands of the Mighty One of Jacob— There, the Shepherd, the Rock of Israel—

11. **Genesis Rabbah 87:8 Midrash on Potiphar’s wife. She is unattractive:**

Potiphar’s wife was obsessed: she let Joseph’s garments “grow old in her keeping, embracing, kissing and fondling them”

**Genesis Rabbah 87:10** and she “placed an iron fork under his neck so that he would have to lift up his eyes to look at her”

**And as reported in Louis Ginzberg, Legends of the Jews vol. 2, pp. 52 ff.:**

“The Egyptian women, daughters of Kings, desired to gaze at Joseph’s face, yet he would not look upon any of them.”

“…when Joseph went forth to rule over Egypt, daughters of kings used to look at him through lattices and throw bracelets, necklets, and earrings, and finger-rings to him, so that he might lift up his eyes to look at them; yet he did not look at them.”

“R. Huna said in R. Mattenah’s name: he saw his father’s face which cooled his blood. R. Menahemah said in R. Ammi’s name: He saw his mother’s face which cooled his blood.”

12. **Coats in the Qu’ran: Sura 12:15-18 Jacob given coat with false blood**

and they produced his tunic with false blood upon it. [But Jacob] exclaimed: "Nay, but it is your [own] minds that have made [so terrible] a happening seem a matter of little account to you! 17 But [as for myself,] patience in adversity is most goodly [in the sight of God]; and it is to God [alone] that I pray to give me strength to bear the misfortune which you have described to me."


[12:25] The two of them raced towards the door, and, in the process, she tore his garment from the back. They found her husband at the door. She said, "What should be the
punishment for one who wanted to molest your wife, except imprisonment or a painful
punishment?"
[12:26] He said, "She is the one who tried to seduce me." A witness from her family
suggested: 'If his garment is torn from the front, then she is telling the truth and he is a
liar.
[12:27] "And if his garment is torn from the back, then she lied, and he is telling the
truth."
[12:28] When her husband saw that his garment was torn from the back, he said, "This is
a woman's scheme. Indeed, your scheming is formidable.
[12:29] "Joseph, disregard this incident. As for you (my wife), you should seek
forgiveness for your sin. You have committed an error."

14. The Qu'ran adds a third coat to Joseph's wardrobe. Sura 12:92-98
12:92] He said, 'There is no blame upon you today. May GOD forgive you. Of all the
merciful ones, He is the Most Merciful.
12:93] 'Take this shirt of mine; when you throw it on my father's face, his vision will be
restored. Bring your whole family and come back to me.'
12:94] Even before the caravan arrived, their father said, 'I can sense the smell of
Joseph. Will someone enlighten me?'
12:95] They said, 'By GOD, you are still in your old confusion.'
12:96] When the bearer of good news arrived, he threw (the shirt) on his face,
whereupon his vision was restored. He said, 'Did I not tell you that I knew from GOD
what you did not know?'
12:97] They said, 'Our father, pray for our forgiveness; we were wrong indeed.'
12:98] He said, 'I will implore my Lord to forgive you; He is the Forgiver, Most
Merciful.'

15. Otto Weininger *Sex and Character* (1903)
"The congruity between Jews and women further reveals itself in the extreme adaptability
of the Jews. . . . in fact the mode in which, like women, because they are nothing, they
can become everything."

Spain,” *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, 73, No. 3 (Fall, 1999), 447-456.
European conviction as late as the seventeenth-century that Jewish men menstruate.