

# Joseph the Socialist

by: Rabbi Jeremy Rosen

The famine continues. Joseph is the master of Egypt. At first the Egyptians can buy food. When the money runs out they have to sell their flocks and herds. Finally, Joseph takes over all their lands and turns them into serfs. But more than this, he moves them away from their original lands and transfers them to other locations in Egypt. This way their historical connection with their lands will be lost.

Joseph has in fact nationalized the whole of Egypt. Only the lands of the Priests are left untouched. This was a master stroke. You do not want to alienate the elite. But then this is not ideological nationalization. The Torah has no interest in specific political systems, be they of the right or left. Its concern is with human behavior, morality. Joseph has established Pharaoh as master of all Egypt. He has been a faithful servant. But one will not be surprised if the masses resented him and soon forgot that he saved their lives. Such is human ingratitude.

The shift in public opinion is not a modern phenomenon. Joseph's success for one part of Egyptian society inevitably led to the hatred of him and his descendants for having brought about such a fundamental change in Egyptian society.

We may work for our bosses. But if we neglect our contemporaries, the weak and the poor, we will soon find ourselves on the wrong side of history. Of course, Joseph had no choice and his intention was simply to do his best for his master. He had no option. But a such a brilliant administrator and wise man might have foreseen the consequences.