Joseph forgave, but forgot nothing. In truth, he never forgot anything. He remembered his father at every moment and in every place. Though he could not understand some of his father's attitudes, he still thought of him. And he always remembered his people. At the height of his glory the Pharaoh gave him the surname of *Tzofnat Paneach,* the code-breaker, but he chose to keep his Jewish name: Joseph. Though he was worshipped, idolized by Egyptian nobility, he showed himself openly with his destitute family. Beneath a succession of masks, his loyalty had remained intact. He was on his way to the top, yet he knew when to halt, turn back and reassert his faith in his family in spite of them. And his faith in God, in spite of himself. That was his strength.

Any man who is fair-minded with one man or one group of men is fair-minded with all. By working for his people, a Jew helps mankind. Joseph was generous both with his kin and with his fellow citizens. He was the first to know how to reconcile his love for Israel with his love of other nations; he was the first to know how absurd and futile it is to oppose Judaism to universality.

A legend: Yehuda, the strongest of the brothers, confronted Joseph, whom he still believed to be an Egyptian potentate. The argument revolved around Benjamin. In his anger, Yehuda became capable of "crushing pellets of iron between his teeth." He shouted: If I unsheathe my sword, I shall destroy your kingdom from one end to the other. — Unsheathe your sword, and I will twist it around your neck, answered Joseph. — If I open my mouth, I shall swallow you, shouted Yehuda. — Open it and I shall close it with a stone . . . came Joseph's reply. Then Yehuda ordered his brothers to set the land on fire and lay it to waste. Only then, to save Egypt, did Joseph decide to stop his act; he dropped his mask: *It is I, Joseph, your brother.*

When he succeeded in vanquishing his bitterness and eventually transforming it into inspiration and love, he became a reconciled, happy man. At peace with his father, his brothers, his neighbors, his subjects. He reached his peak of achievement after Jacob's death. His brothers worried: As long as our father was alive, Joseph left us alone; now he will settle his accounts with us. To which Joseph replied: If ten candles did not succeed in extinguishing one lonely candle, how could one extinguish ten? Yes, he forgave; but he had forgotten nothing.

What does all this mean? That one is not born a *Tzaddik;* one must strive to become one. And having become a *Tzaddik,* one must strive to remain one.

There is in Joseph a duality which influences his deeds and his choices and makes him into a genuine, therefore torn, person. He lived on two levels, in two worlds, tossed back and forth by frequently contradictory forces. He had to choose and decide who he wanted to be. He had to choose to fight and win.

A tragic figure, Joseph is the father, or in any case, the forerunner of a Messiah, an unhappy, unlucky Messiah; the hero-victim who, according to tradition, must pave the way for the coming of the other, the true Messiah, son of David.

While the tribes were busy selling their brother, and Jacob was perfecting his fast, and Yehuda was taking a wife, God was busy creating the light of the Messiah, says the Midrash. A somber light, no doubt. For the Messiah it illuminated—Joseph's descendant—was to fall in combat heroically, tragically.

Joseph knew it, just as he knew or should have known that the kingdom of his descendants, the kingdom of Shilo, would be destroyed. And yet he did not give in to despair.

Joseph knew—and who was in a better position to know —that to be the first Jewish prince in history, to be the first to liberate Jews outside their homeland, would be difficult and unrewarding. A descendant of Yehuda's was to wear the crown of Jewish sovereignty, symbolizing eternal promise and eternal dawn.

And yet, Joseph did not despair.

He assumed his destiny and tried to give it meaning from within. He lived his eternal life in the here-and-now, demonstrating that it is possible for the slave to be prince, for the dreamer to link his past to the future, for the victor to open himself to the supreme passion that is love.

What a story: it tells us in one breath that the first exile was caused by the disruptive jealousy of men who were brothers; that exile leads to redemption if only one dreams of it without despair and . . . remains true to oneself.

Joseph was not born a *Tzaddik,* nor did he have the childhood or the education of a *Tzaddik;* that is why his triumph excites us. Whatever Joseph obtained from himself, he owed only to himself.

His reward? Moses personally took care of his funeral. Why such a privilege? Because while his ancestors had to deal with God and proved themselves worthy, Joseph had to deal with men and proved himself no less worthy. To suffer at the hands of God is less painful—or painful in a different way—than suffering the cruelty of men, even if they are our brothers, particularly if they are our brothers. Joseph, the first Jew to suffer at the hands of Jews, succeeded in mastering his grief and disappointment and linking his fate to theirs.

Joseph—a *Tzaddik?* The title was, unquestionably, deserved. In the Biblical text there is another adjective that describes him well: beautiful.

His only error: he should not have revealed his dreams.