Who is Joseph?

Where do we begin to look for the answer.

On the one hand he was the favorite of his father, as was Benjamin to become after Joseph disappeared.

But Joseph was more a brother than a son. His brothers were jealous of his father’s favoritism, and wished him dead. So they sold him off to merchants heading south to Egypt, and fabricated a story of his death, with the cloak of many colors spotted with blood.

In another version of the story, his brothers killed him, and fabricated the story of his being sold off.

In another version he never had any brothers. He was an Egyptian, jailed for approaching his master Potiphar’s wife, and skilled at convincing people he was a seer who could interpret dreams. Part of his story was that he was able to convince people, even Pharaoh or Trump, that his interpretations came from god, not from himself. He pretended to be a Cohen and went to jail with other scoundrels, but somehow in going to jail successfully painted himself as a victim of Potiphar, who was, incidentally, also a Jew in disguise, and who married the goyishe Zuleika who had been a bellydancer before Potiphar, aka Azeez, found her in a seedy café dancing for tips. Now she’s a high-up mucky muck first lady.

The story goes back before that, but it’s best to return to the original question before we get lost altogether. Who was joseph. I will give my answer, and then you can all go and eat the Kiddoish which you all cooked anyway.

Joseph is the one who weeps. Perhaps I could say weeps and sees. His father saw his beauty as a reflection of his beloved Rachel, the one with beautiful dark eyes, and in his grief at her loss kept the beautiful boy at his side. When Judah pleads for Benjamin, he says,

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| 24And it came to pass when we went up to your servant, my father, and we told him the words of my lord, |
| 25that our father said, 'Go back, buy us a little food.'—ein bischen essen. So hungry were we, we salivated. |
| 26But we said, 'We cannot go down; [only] if our youngest brother is with us will we go down, for we cannot see the man's face if our youngest brother is not with us.' |
| 27And your servant, my father, said to us, 'You know that my wife bore me two [children]. |
| 28The one went away from me, and I said, "He has surely been torn to pieces, and I have not seen him since." |
| 29Now if you take this one too away from me, and misfortune befalls him, you will bring down my hoary head in misery to the grave.' |
| 30And now, when I come to your servant, my father, and the boy is not with us [since] his soul is attached to his (the boy's) soul,  31it will come to pass, when he sees that the boy is gone, he will die, and your servants will have brought down the hoary head of your servant, our father, in grief to the grave. |
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“You know my wife bore me two boys. “

Judah weeps for his father whose hoary head bears the weight of loss, of all the loss. Judah who had said, all those years ago, 37:26 “What do we gain by killing our brother and covering up his blood? Come, let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, but let us not do away with him ourselves.” His brothers agreed.

Who is joseph, then? The one his brothers agreed to sell. Reuben, just throw him in a pit. Judah, what do we gain by killing our brother. From Cain to Shem to Ishmael to Esau to every brother, to the 12 brothers, the oldest to the youngest, all tied to their mothers, all seeking the father’s blessing, competing for the hand on their head to tell them they were the special one, the jew who would save them all one day, take them home, and make it big.

Sold off, and for whom we will never cease to pay. Because he was so perfect, so blessed, so great a basketball player his jump shots were a joy to see, because he could dance so gracefully all the girls dreamed of him at night, so that he could never be touched with all the schmutz on earth. And he earned 4.0s without having to study. He didn’t need a fancy sportscar, but we lent him ours. Ah joseph, we all loved him, despite ourselves. No wonder the brothers threw him in a pit and put all that schmutz on the fancy robe his father Israel Horowitz, the tailor, had given him. They were the schmutz, just ordinary jews like you and me, making a good dish for kiddish so we could eat it ourselves. Ah, jewish humor could never touch joseph. What could we do: our fathers had only two sons? What were we, chopped liver? gornischt? Even our Yiddish ist verstuncken. Borscht. Putz. Schmuck. That’s all we got.

So he said, "I am Joseph. Is my father still alive?" And we didn’t know what to say. He was the same joseph. So were we—the same old Judah and simeon and reuben and levi, asher, Naphtali, Issachar, Zebulun, Gad, Dan. Which of us had said to throw him in the pit? Not me, not me. Not the benyamin. Only age had not touched his beauty, whereas you don’t want to hear what we had become, old, worn, thin, poor, begging brothers who went to the richest man on earth to ask for cast offs, for coins, for clothes, for food for our poor father who had to beg and send his sons, his big fancy useless s.o.b. sons out in the street to beg, and then, even down south, to the deepest south, to beg and beg and return to beg again, please massah, please Adonai, we your abd, your servants, and your servants’ father, are dying, are starving like all those children in Yemen, please anything.

And the Adonai looked at them, and said these words we will never ever forget: I am your brother Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt.

No, anything but that. We who had thought all that was over. The brother who died in Aufschwitz, returning with his reproachful eyes. No. Not even that. He would never stoop to reproach us. He went down without a word, not a cry in the pit, not a cry when those damn Ishmaelites gave us the gelt and took away the beautiful boy, without even a cloak to protect him from the cold.

Well, all that was so long ago.

And now, I Judah ben Israel, his oldest remaining brother, know better. When he said, who sold me down to Egypt, sold me down the river, he was never touched. He turned and turned, and when he was done, there we were again, needing his help to be saved, and he cleverly turned the wheel so we would have to cry and kiss him back. You know what he said: it was for the best, my brothers, it was not you, not me, but Adonai elohaynu who wanted me to go down to Egypt, who wanted you to come here to me now. Come kiss me. I longed for you all these years.

I know he just said those last lines to make us feel good. What would you have said? Everyone said I made a great speech, but the truth is I was speechless. We were caught in a moment where words were not possible, where words became like light—your hand could pass through it, clear, invisible, like us, brothers in time out of time.

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| 14And he fell on his brother Benjamin's neck and wept, and Benjamin wept on his neck. |
| 15And he kissed all his brothers and wept over them, and afterwards his brothers spoke with him. |

But no one ever knew what they said. No one could say, I remember what we said. All I remember is this: “4Then Joseph said to his brothers, "Please come closer to me," and they drew closer. And he said, "I am your brother Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt.” And then we all wept.

So tell me, please, who was Joseph?