

# OHRNET

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## PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

### ***Dark Alleyways***

***“And Yaakov dwelt in the land of his father’s sojournings...” (37:1)***

Our parsha opens with a quiet word: **Vayeshev** — “he settled.” After a lifetime of struggle, Yaakov seeks calm. *Yishuv ha-da’at*; tranquility. Instead, the great storm of Yosef in Egypt is about to break.

**History advances through concealment.** When the world darkens, we must know the inner light is gathering strength. Yosef’s descent into Egypt is in fact the hidden beginning of the redemption. The brothers cannot see it, but Hashem is already weaving the future.

In our days, too, the world feels similarly unsettled. Large cultural shifts are taking place. Growing segments of society are adopting narratives that are, at times, deeply unsympathetic to the Jewish People. Public hostility and demonstrations flourish, with attitudes that echo ancient resentments in modern form.

History has shown that when a society absorbs strong ideological currents hostile to Jews — even when coming from only part of a larger community — the atmosphere for Jews becomes more challenging.

The Torah teaches us not to fear that darkness, but to see within it the outline of a larger plan.

Egypt, the most threatening place for Yosef, becomes the very place of his ascendance. Egypt does not define him; he defines himself amidst the host culture. “*Vayehi Hashem et Yosef — G-d is with Yosef*” — and Yosef therefore becomes a source of blessing, both for himself and for his host culture.

This is our path as well: We look at the shifts in the world, the rising tensions, the uncertainty — and we remember that the Jewish People have often walked through the darkest alleyways of history; but we always emerge stronger and more defined. The pressure clarifies who we are. It deepens our unity. It awakens the spiritual strength that complacency has weakened within us.

*Vayeshev* — Yaakov seeks to settle, but Hashem calls him to rise. And in our time, when the world around us shifts like sand, Hashem calls us too: to deepen our faith, to strengthen our connection to Torah, and to live with the purpose and dignity that is our heritage.

Yosef's story reminds us that concealed in every descent lies the seed of ascent. Behind every challenge lies hidden Divine guidance. And behind every threatening shadow lies a future of light that Hashem is already preparing. May we merit to see that light revealed — swiftly, peacefully, and openly — for all of *Klal Yisrael* and for the whole world.

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## PARSHA OVERVIEW

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Yaakov settles in the land of Canaan. His favorite son, Yosef, brings him critical reports about his brothers. Yaakov makes Yosef a fine tunic of multi-colored woolen strips. Yosef exacerbates his brothers' hatred by recounting prophetic dreams of sheaves of wheat bowing to his sheaf, and of the sun, moon and stars bowing to him, signifying that all his family will appoint him king. The brothers indict Yosef and resolve to execute him. When Yosef comes to Shechem, the brothers relent and decide, at Reuven's instigation, to throw him into a pit instead. Reuven's intent was to save Yosef. Yehuda persuades the brothers to take Yosef out of the pit and sell him to a caravan of passing Ishmaelites. Reuven returns to find the pit empty and rends his clothes. The brothers soak Yosef's tunic in goat's blood and show it to Yaakov, who assumes that Yosef has been devoured by a wild beast. Yaakov is inconsolable. Meanwhile, in Egypt, Yosef has been sold to Potiphar, Pharaoh's Chamberlain of the Butchers.

In the Torah portion's sub-plot, Yehuda's son Er dies as punishment for preventing his wife Tamar from becoming pregnant. Onan, Yehuda's second son, then weds Tamar by levirate marriage. He too is punished in similar circumstances. When Yehuda's wife dies, Tamar resolves to have children through Yehuda, as this union will found the Davidic line culminating in the *Mashiach*.

Meanwhile, Yosef rises to power in the house of his Egyptian master. His extreme beauty attracts the unwanted advances of his master's wife. Enraged by his rejection, she accuses Yosef of attempting to seduce her, and he is imprisoned. In prison, Yosef successfully predicts the outcome of the dream of Pharaoh's wine steward, who is reinstated, and the dream of Pharaoh's baker, who is hanged. In spite of his promise, the wine steward forgets to help Yosef, and Yosef languishes in prison.

## Questions

1. "These are the offspring of Yaakov: Yosef...." Give three reasons why Yosef is considered Yaakov's main offspring.
2. What was praiseworthy about the fact that Yosef's brothers did not speak to him in a friendly manner?
3. How do we see from Yosef's dream about the sun, moon and stars that all dreams contain some untrue element?
4. Who brought Yosef down to Egypt?
5. Where was Reuven when Yosef was sold?
6. In addition to the brothers, who else knew that Yosef was alive?
7. Why didn't G-d reveal prophetically to Yaakov that Yosef was alive?
8. For how long did Yaakov mourn the loss of Yosef?
9. Verse 37:35 states "his father wept for him." Whose father wept for whom?
10. Who was Tamar's father?
11. In what merit did Tamar deserve to have kings as her descendants?
12. Why is the word "hand" mentioned four times in connection to the birth of Zerach?
13. Why does the Torah relate the incident with Potiphar's wife immediately after the incident of Yehuda and Tamar?
14. How did Potiphar see that Hashem was with Yosef?
15. Who in this week's Parsha pretended to be sick?
16. Why were the butler and the baker imprisoned?
17. For how long were the butler and the baker in prison?
18. How did the baker know that Yosef had correctly interpreted the butler's dream?
19. What prompted the butler and baker to tell Yosef their dreams?
20. How was Yosef punished for asking the butler for help?

## Answers

1. 37:2 - (a) Yosef was the son of Rachel, Yaakov's primary wife. (b) Yosef looked like Yaakov. (c) All that befell Yaakov befell Yosef.
2. 37:4 - They did not act hypocritically.
3. 37:10 - The moon represents Rachel. Since she had already died, it was impossible for that element of the dream to come true.
4. 37:28 - A caravan of Midianites.
5. 37:29 - He was attending to Yaakov.
6. 37:33 - Yitzchak.
7. 37:33 - Because the brothers had issued a ban against revealing the truth to Yaakov, and G-d abided, so to speak, by their ban.
8. 37:34 - Twenty-two years.
9. 37:35 – Yitzchak wept for his son Yaakov, who was suffering.
10. 38:24 - Shem.
11. 38:26 - In the merit of her modesty.
12. 38:30 - To allude to his descendent, Achan, who sinned with his hand by taking four things from the spoils of Jericho.
13. 39:1 - To teach us that just as Tamar acted with pure motives, so did Potiphar's wife.
14. 39:3 - Yosef mentioned Hashem frequently in his speech.
15. 39:11 – Potiphar's wife.
16. 40:1 - The butler was imprisoned because a fly was found in the king's goblet; the baker was imprisoned because a pebble was found in the king's bread.
17. 40:4 - Twelve months.
18. 40:5 - The baker dreamed the interpretation of the butler's dream.
19. 40:6 - Yosef asked them why they looked troubled.
20. 40:23 - He remained in prison for an additional two years.

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# COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

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by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

Mevarchim HaChodesh  
Blessing the New Month (Part 6)

*“The greatest darkness comes just before dawn –  
but most people give up one minute before the light.”*

Ba'al Shem Tov

*Mevarchim HaChodesh* continues: **He who performed miracles for our forefathers and redeemed them from slavery to freedom, may He redeem us soon and gather in the dispersed from the four corners of the earth; all [the People of] Israel becoming friends. And let us say, Amen.**

Whilst this *tefillah* of ours refers to *all* the miracles we have experienced throughout history, yet there is a particular emphasis on the miracles that took place when we left Egypt. As mentioned previously, *Kiddush HaChodesh* (*sanctifying the new month*) was the very first mitzvah given to us as a Nation, just prior to our leaving Egypt. In effect, one of the central symbolisms of *Mevarchim HaChodesh* is that Hashem chose us to be His nation, and it represents the profundity and the intensity of our relationship with Hashem.

And, it is at this providential moment that we beseech Hashem to redeem us one more time. We ask that the approaching new month herald the Final Redemption with the ingathering of the Jewish People, from all over the world, to be greeted by the *mashiach* in Yerushalayim.

Our *tefillah* draws to an end with the seemingly incongruous phrase “*Chaverim kol Yisrael – All the People of Israel becoming friends.*” The word used for friends here is “*chaverim.*” *Lashon HaKodesh* has several words denoting friendship, but as there are no true synonyms in *Lashon HaKodesh*, each word thus carries its own distinct nuance. The word “*chaver*”, singular of “*chaverim*”, comes from the word “*chiboor*”, a connection that bonds two entities together in a strong and durable way. The word “*chaver*” thus denotes a friendship that is deep and consequential.

As the French writer Simone de Beauvoir (1908-1986) wrote, “One’s life has value so long as one attributes value to the life of others, by means of love, friendship, and compassion.”

Friendship between Jews from all different backgrounds and cultures is what will finally dismantle the barriers that now prevent *mashiach*’s arrival. As Shlomo HaMelech writes in *Kohelet* (14:9-10): “*Two are better than one...for if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow; but woe to him that is alone when he falls, because there is no one to help him up.*”

Friendship, Shlomo HaMelech teaches us, is significantly more than just companionship. Friendship creates partnership, where each person's strength complements the other's, and compensates for their weaknesses. *Chaverim*, together, have the potential to create a formidable team and change the fabric of our world. Unity can overcome everything.

Our Sages (*Talmud Yerushalmi, Peah* 1:1) describe the frequent victories that the wicked, heretical King Achav had in battle, his remarkably surprising successes considering just how immersed he and his generation were in idol worship and how focused they were on provoking Hashem. The Rabbis ascribe Achav's triumphs to the fact that the people of Achav's generation were united in their concern for each other; they did not speak *lashon harah* about each other, nor did they inform against one another. Therefore, despite their rejection of Hashem, they defeated their enemies time and time again by virtue of the spiritual merits they earned through their unity!

Rabbi Meir Simcha haKohen of Dvinsk (1843-1926), one of the most brilliant and prominent leaders of Ashkenazic Jewry between the two World Wars, points out in his timeless commentary *Meshech Chochmah*, that being victorious over our enemies depends on how close the *Shechinah* is to us. Cites a verse from *Vayikra* (16:16) that Hashem "*Dwells among them in the midst of their impurities*," he explains that, notwithstanding their sacrilegious lifestyle, the unity that bound the generation of Achav together protected them, kept the *Shechina* close to them, and kept them safe and victorious on the battlefield.

That is the power of "*Chaverim kol Yisrael*."

The words of our *tefillah* convey to us a powerful, albeit subliminal, lesson: Until that thrilling, long-anticipated moment when *mashiach* reveals his identity, it is up to each and every one of us to do our best to expose as many Jews as possible to the unparalleled beauty and majesty of authentic Judaism; that the more Jews we connect to – the more *chaverim* that we establish – the faster will come the Final Redemption.

*To be continued...*

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# TAAMEI HAMITZVOS – Reasons behind the Mitzvos

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by Rabbi Shmuel Kraines

## **Eating a Living Animal** Mitzvah #452; *Yoreh Deah* §62

One of the seven mitzvos that apply to all mankind is the prohibition against eating a limb that was removed from a living animal (*eiver min hachai*). This mitzvah teaches us compassion, because there is nothing as cruel as eating an animal alive, and doing so influences a person to have a cruel nature (*Rabbeinu Bechaye* and *Sefer HaChinuch*).

We may add that this act is also savage and animalistic. Carnivorous animals such as lions prefer to eat fresh meat, and meat is freshest when the animal is alive. Since a human being is a soul combined with an animalistic body, we have inherent animalistic desires, and the Torah commands us to control them.

The Torah terms eating a living animal “*eating the soul together with the flesh*” (*Devarim* 12:23). Based on this verse, *Radvaz* (*Metzudas David* §189) explains that the Torah prohibits eating a living animal because it is like eating its soul. One must first slaughter the animal in order to separate the soul from the body.

Why does this mitzvah apply to all humanity? The reason appears to be that extreme cruelty and animalistic savagery offend basic moral sensitivities. To illustrate this point, Nevuchadnetzar, an infamously cruel and immoral king, was once found eating a live hare. While his other atrocities were well-known, he did his utmost to keep this act secret (*Shabbos* 149b and *Tanchuma, Va’eschanan*, Buber ed., §1).

It is a wonder, therefore, that the practice of eating live animals still exists in some cultures today.