

# VAYEISHEV



ALIYA-BY-ALIYA  
SEDRA SUMMARY



**Rabbi Reuven  
Tradburks**  
Director of  
RCA Israel Region

The sale of Yosef in Parshat Vayeishev is one of the most famous stories of the Torah. Yaakov settles, finally, in the land of Israel. Yosef is favored. Yosef has 2 dreams. Yaakov sends Yosef to inquire of his brother's welfare. The brothers sell Yosef to merchants traveling to Egypt. Yehuda is confronted by Tamar and accepts responsibility. Yosef achieves great success as a servant to Potiphar. After being framed by Potiphar's wife, Yosef ends up in jail. His success continues in jail. He interprets the dreams of the butler and baker but remains in jail.

The story of Yosef is the longest in the Torah, spanning 4 parshiot. It's panoply of human emotions and conditions are

May the Torah learned from this issue  
of Torah Tidbits be לעילוי נשמת

Our Father, Grandfather,  
Great-Grandfather

**Rabbi James I. Gordon z"l**

ר' יעקב ישראל בן שניאור אברהם ז"ל

כ"ו כסלו - נר שני דחנוכה

*Missed very much by his loved ones*

*The Gordon family*

gripping: a favored child, dreams, jealousy, isolation, sexual struggle, success. And later; tears, confrontation and brotherly responsibility. It is the story that lays bare human foibles; hence its appeal and fame.



**1<sup>st</sup> Aliya (37:1-12)** Yaakov settles in the land of Israel. Yosef is 17, brings reports to his father. Yaakov loves Yosef. He gives him a special coat, provoking the jealousy of his brothers. Yosef has 2 dreams. The brothers, gathering sheaves of wheat, gather around and bow to Yosef's. The sun, moon and 11 stars bow to him. The brothers feel hatred. Yaakov, while criticizing Yosef, takes note of the dreams.

The first verse, while eminently simple, introduces this entire story. "Yaakov settled in the land of his father's sojourning." As if to say: they were sojourners, but not me. I am going to be a settler. Avraham was promised the Land of Israel. And that his children would be strangers in a strange land, returning wealthy to Israel. Yaakov figures, "hey, that was me. Long years with Lavan. Returned wealthy. Now on to the next stage of Jewish history: settling and ruling this land".

The time to settle and eventually rule this land has arrived. Building a state requires an economic change, from shepherding to farming. And rule requires power.

When Yosef dreams not of sheep but of bundles of wheat, Yaakov's ears perk up. Why a dream of wheat when we are shepherds? Is this a new world dawning?

And then a dream of power, of the sun, moon and stars. Is this a Divine message, through dreams, that the promise of the

land is about to happen, with agriculture and power facilitating the building of our nation?



**2<sup>nd</sup> Aliya (37:13-22)** Yaakov sends Yosef to inquire of the welfare of his brothers. A man directs him to Dotan. The brothers plot to kill Yosef and put an end to his dreams. Reuven objects to spilling his blood, suggesting to merely throw him into a pit. He saves Yosef, hoping to return him to his father.

The single best known aliya in the Torah (ok, because of Broadway – oh, such is our world). Brothers wanting to kill their brother? This is unprecedented. Well, except for the first brothers in the Torah, Cain and Abel. Rivalry, competition, jealousy is an inescapable part of life. Brothers struggle (as the Midrash says re Cain and Abel) over inheritance money, religion, marriage or here, parental love and jealousy. Had the Torah avoided this sibling rivalry, it would have lacked the reality of life. But what is of much greater import is the response to rivalry. The response of sibling loyalty, brotherhood and responsibility (and lack of it) is the story of the Torah. Human failures will happen – how to respond is the concern of our Torah.



**3<sup>rd</sup> Aliya (37:23-36)** Yosef is stripped of his coat, thrown in an empty cistern. Merchants appear.

Yehuda objects to killing their brother, convincing the others to sell Yosef to these merchants. Yosef is sold to the merchants and brought to Egypt. Reuven finds the cistern empty and rends his garments. Yosef's coat is dipped in blood, brought to Yaakov. Yaakov rips his clothes and is inconsolable. Yosef ends up in the home of Potiphar.



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Yosef dreamed of the sun, moon and stars – as high as you can get – and ends in the pit, as low as you can get. Yaakov, who dreamt of a ladder ascending to the heavens, now says he will “sink to the netherworld in mourning”. Yaakov deceived Yitzchak with goatskin on his arms; Yaakov is deceived by Yosef’s coat dipped in goat’s blood.




**4<sup>th</sup> Aliya (38:1-30)** Yehuda descends. He has 3 sons. 1 son marries Tamar and dies, as does the 2nd. He delays the 3<sup>rd</sup> son from marrying her. Tamar disguises herself. She becomes pregnant from Yehuda. Yehuda orders her to be put to death. She sends his identifying possessions. Yehuda admits. She has twins, Peretz and Zerach.

Yehuda descends. But ends up with Zerach – shine. Yehuda withheld his 3<sup>rd</sup> son from Tamar, as he withheld Yosef from returning to Yaakov by selling Yosef. But here he took full responsibility whereas there he didn’t. When the brothers wanted to kill Yosef, Reuven told them to throw him in a pit. Ok, don’t kill him with a knife; kill him passively, of starvation. Yehuda stood up; let’s not kill him, let’s sell him. That certainly was better than killing him. But he really should have objected more vociferously and said: “I will not let you harm Yosef. I will return him to Abba.” Here he takes full responsibility. This is a harbinger of the full acceptance of responsibility he will demonstrate later in guaranteeing Binyamin’s return to Yaakov.




**5<sup>th</sup> Aliya (39:1-6)** Yosef descends to Egypt. G-d is with Yosef and he is successful. Yosef’s owner sees that G-d is with him and that all he does








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G-d makes successful. G-d blesses the master's home because of Yosef; all that is his in his home and field, G-d blesses. He gives Yosef total control of all that is his.

A little wee aliya of 6 verses. And G-d's name appears 6 times. G-d's name did not appear in the 66 verses until here in the parsha (save for the death of the 2 sons of Yehuda: "they did bad in the eyes of G-d"). This is very similar to the absence of G-d in the beginning of Sefer Shemot until He finally sees their affliction.

Man does just fine spiraling down all by himself – Yosef at the hands of his brothers, Yehuda with his mishandling of Tamar, the Jews in Egypt at the hands of Paro. When he hits bottom, G-d appears.



**6<sup>th</sup> Aliya (39:7-23)** Potiphar's wife propositions Yosef. Yosef resists, for as much as he has

complete authority in the home, this would be a sin to G-d. With no one around, she grabs him. He flees, leaving her holding his garment. She frames Yosef as having approached her. Yosef is thrown in jail. G-d is kind to him and the jail keeper puts Yosef in charge. All that he does, G-d makes successful.

Note the parallels: The brother's take Yosef's coat from him; Mrs. Potiphar is holding Yosef's garment. The brother's deceive their father with the coat; Mrs. Potiphar deceives her husband with the coat. Yosef is sold as a slave; Yosef ends up in jail.

From dreaming of the sun, moon and stars, and brothers bowing to him, Yosef has gone down to Egypt, down in status to a slave, and now down yet again to jail.

Yosef earns the title of Yosef HaTzaddik

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from his resistance to Mrs. Potiphar. He is alone, in a foreign land, no one around, being propositioned; yet, his thoughts are sinning to G-d.



**7<sup>th</sup> Aliya (40:1-23)** The butler and baker of Paro are jailed. Yosef takes care of them. They dream.

Yosef asks: tell me the dreams for their explanations are to G-d. The butler saw a fruitful vine, squeezing the grapes into the cup of Paro. Yosef says: you will be restored as butler. And, Yosef adds, remember me when things are good again and tell Paro, for I don't deserve to be here. The baker describes dreaming of bread on his head. Yosef says: you will be hung. The butler is restored. The baker is hung. The butler forgets Yosef.

While the Yosef story moves quickly for us the reader, years have passed. 2 years will pass from the butler being restored until Yosef interprets Paro's dream next week. He was 17 when the brothers sold him. Now he is 28. He will be 30 when he interprets Paro's dreams.

And if Yosef is such a good interpreter of dreams – well, he himself had 2 dreams. What does he make of *his* dreams? He

dreamt of the brother's bundles of wheat bowing to him. And of power, all bowing to him. Does he mull over his dreams every once in a while? Every week? Every day? He tells Paro that he having 2 dreams implies that they will happen soon. He had 2 dreams. His dreams didn't happen soon. Does he think they will still happen? After all, how soon is soon? A few days? Or 25 years?

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## HAFTORAH

### AMOS 2:6-3:8

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This week's *haftorah* contains an allusion to the sale of Yosef by his brothers, discussed in this week's Torah reading.

Amos opens with a rebuke to the Jewish People. G-d had been patient with them notwithstanding their transgression of the three cardinal sins — sexual impropriety, idolatry and murder. Their fourth sin, however, crossed the line — the mistreatment of the innocent, widows, orphans and the poor.

G-d reminds the Jewish people how He lovingly took them out of Egypt and led them through the desert for forty years and

## A SHORT VORT | BY RABBI CHANUCH YERES

Rav, Beit Knesset Beit Yisrael, Yemin Moshe

“וַיִּשְׂנְאוּ אוֹתוֹ וְלֹא יָכִילוּ דְבַר לְשָׁלוֹם” (37:4)

“They (the brothers) hated him (Yosef) and could not speak peacefully unto him.”

A question asked: Isn't it obvious and taken for granted, that once Yosef's brothers hated him, for sure they would not be able to have a civil conversation? What is the pasuk telling us?

Rabbi Yonatan Eibeschitz (1690-1764, Dayan of Prague) answered that the Pasuk should be understood in the inverted order. It should be explained that because “they could not speak peacefully to him” they ended up “hating him”. Had they been able to talk out their frustrations and anger, they would have been able to reconcile their differences.

Rabbi Eibeschitz elaborated that this is the true source of any controversy, that no side can converse or listen with the other side. This is the message of the story of Yosef to us, how we can resolve our differences, if we would talk it out. Shabbat Shalom!

settled them in the Holy Land. There, He bestowed the gift of prophecy on some and inspired others to become Nazirites. Yet the Jewish people did not respond appropriately, giving wine to the Nazirites and instructing the prophets not to prophesy.

The haftorah ends with an admonition from G-d, one that also recalls His eternal love for His people. As opposed to other nations to whom G-d does not pay close attention, G-d's love for His nation causes Him to punish them for their misdeeds, to cleanse them and prod them back onto the path of the just. ■



## STATS

9th of 54 sedras; 9th of 12 in B'reishit

Written on 190 lines, ranks 28th

4 Parshiyot; 3 open, 1 closed

112 p'sukim - ranks 24th

1558 words - ranks 24th



## MITZVOT

No mitzvot are counted from Vayeishev

May the Torah learned on  
Thursday, November 25  
be in loving memory of  
לעילוי נשמת

**Sylvia David a"h**

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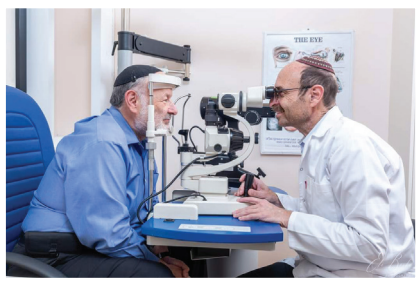
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