



ALIYA-BY-ALIYA SEDRA SUMMARY

RABBI REUVEN TRADBURKS
RCA ISRAEL REGION

PARSHAT VAYEISHEV

The story of Yosef beginning in Parshat Vayeishev is of the most beloved 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.



1ST ALIYA (37:1-12)

Yaakov settles in the Land of Israel. Yosef, 17, brings negative reports of his brothers to his father. Yaakov loves Yosef. He gives him a special coat, provoking the jealousy of his brothers. Yosef has 2 dreams. The brothers are gathering sheaves of wheat; their sheaves 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 serves as an introduction. By using 2 different words for settling, the Torah is hinting at a difference. "Yaakov settled in the Land of his father's sojourning." As if to say: Yaakov settled where they sojourning. Avraham described himself as a

"ger v'toshav"; I live here but I am an outsider. Yaakov is doing what Avraham and Yitzchak did not; I am settling where you only sojourned.

I am going to settle here, in my own Land. 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. I was the stranger in a strange land. 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. A state cannot be built by shepherds: agriculture roots one in the land and can sustain a nation. And rule requires power. That is what my father, Yitzchak blessed me with; agricultural abundance and power. But, as I told Esav, the blessing was a dud, because I never achieved agricultural success, nor 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?

Yaakov takes note of these dreams. Because it is the blessing he received from his father.

That contested blessing that he stole from Esav was this very thing; “you will have much grain and wine, nations will serve you, your brothers will bow to you”. Agricultural abundance, power and position in the family. Yaakov must have been shocked that Yosef would have the very dreams that he, Yaakov, had received as a blessing. The sheaves are agricultural abundance, the bowing is power, and the brothers bowing to him is dominance in the family.



2ND 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.

Brothers wanting to kill their brother? This is unprecedented. Well, except for the first brothers in the Torah, Cain and Abel. Oh, and also Esav wanting to kill Yaakov.

And the irony. In the terrible rape of Dinah, after Shimon and Levi killed all the men, the story ended with a rhetorical question: shall our sister be made a harlot? Meaning, siblings stand up for each other. We cannot stand by and see our sister demeaned. Brothers stand up for each other. And then the brothers want to kill Yosef. What happened to brothers standing up for each other? What an irony.



3RD 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.

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 who could not see; Yaakov himself was deceived by Lavan in the night when he could not see that it was Leah and not Rachel. And again, Yaakov deceived Yitzchak with goatskin on his arms; Yaakov is deceived by Yosef's coat dipped in goat's blood.

Judgement of the actions of the Avot is rarely stated directly, but rather is communicated by the story. What goes around, comes around. And that is a way of passing judgement; you got what you deserved.



4TH ALIYA (38:1-30)

Yehuda descends. He has 3 sons.

One son marries Tamar and dies, as does the second. He delays the 3rd 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.

This story of Yehuda is crucial in his position in the family. Each of those ahead of Yehuda have acted in a way to damage their claim to the position of first-born, the position of the head of the family. Reuven was the first born but lay with his father's wife. Shimon and Levi angered Yaakov by their savage murder of all the men of Shechem. Yehuda is the next in line.

Well, unless Yaakov meant to appoint Yosef as the official first born by giving him

the coat. After all, Yosef is the first born of the favorite wife, Rachel. Are you allowed to subvert the actual first born, of the less favored wife, for the first born of the more favored wife? The Torah will later command explicitly against that.

In a profound story of fault but acceptance of responsibility, here Yehuda corrects his deficiency when he allows Yosef to be thrown in the pit. Yehuda did stand 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. Yehuda earns monarchy not by being perfect but by accepting responsibility, the true example for all leaders; you will err, you will sin, but true leadership is when you accept responsibility not deflecting it.



5TH 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 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.



6TH 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 brothers take Yosef's coat from him; Mrs. Potiphar is holding Yosef's garment. The brothers deceive their father with the coat; Mrs. Potiphar deceives her husband with the coat. Yosef is denied freedom, sold by his brothers as a slave; Yosef is denied freedom, ending 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.



7TH 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 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 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?

HAFTORAH: AMOS 2:6 -3:8

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

Amos opens with a rebuke to the Jewish People. Hashem 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.

Hashem reminds Am Yisrael how He lovingly took them out of Egypt and led them through the desert for forty years and 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 prophesize.

The haftorah ends with an admonition from Hashem, one that also recalls His eternal love for His people: "Hearken to this word which the Lord spoke about you, O children of Israel, concerning the entire nation that I brought up from the land of Egypt. 'Only you did I love above all the families of the earth; therefore, I will visit upon you all your iniquities...'" As opposed to other nations to whom Hashem does not pay close attention, Hashem'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 Bereshit.
Written on 190 lines, ranks 28th.
4 Parshiyot; 3 open, 1 closed.
112 pesukim - ranks 24th.
1558 words - ranks 24th.

MITZVOT

No mitzvot are counted from Vayeishev.

May the learning
in this week's Torah Tidbits
be dedicated to עילוי נשמת our beloved

Sharon Tamar Horowitz a"h
on her 52nd Yahrtzeit
Erev Chanukah

בכל ימי חייה הקצרים
היתה מקור אורה תקוה ואהבה
לכל שידעו אותה!!

*Mina & Howard Millendorf
Sharon, Shlomo, Elior, Amiad
and Yagel Rabinowitz*