



ALIYA-BY-ALIYA SEDRA SUMMARY

RABBI REUVEN TRADBURKS
RCA ISRAEL REGION

PARSHAT MIKETZ

This most beloved and well known of the stories of the Torah is rich in its interpersonal dynamics and messages. But the Torah is not the story only of people, it is the story of G-d and man. The story of Yosef and his brothers, with all its twists and turns is the story of men, with an obscure Divine backdrop. G-d does not speak in the entire story, though man grasps at His Presence.

In a beautiful and subtle manner, the tradition that divided the aliyot sends this message. The name of G-d is in the last verse of aliyot 2,3,4 and 6. They end with a Divine engagement; though all are man's surmising as to G-d's ways. The Divine does not share His Doings. Yosef ascribes his success to G-d but he has to be wondering why he has been spurned from the covenant. And while he tells Paro that G-d is communicating the impending famine, what about his own dreams of his position in his family?

The human story is a pageant of foggy human vision struggling to detect the Divine Hand, seeing snippets of the picture,

then more of the picture, surmising. And will end without seeing the whole picture. While seeking to ascribe Divine involvement in human affairs is a noble pursuit, we never really know His ways. We will only much later understand that this is all a pretext to get all of the Jewish people, the entire people, to Egypt, in order to be redeemed in signs and wonders after hundreds of years.



1ST ALIYA (41:1-14)

2 years later (after the Butler's return to serve Paro), Paro dreams. 7 healthy cows emerge from the water, devoured by 7 skinny ones who emerge after. 7 healthy stalks are devoured by 7 parched ones. Paro is not satisfied by the dream interpretations of his wise men. The Butler remembers Yosef, telling Paro of him. Yosef is shaved, dressed and rushed to Paro.

Dreams aplenty. Yaakov dreamt of the ladder and the angels. Yosef had 2 dreams. The Butler and Baker had dreams. Now Paro has 2 dreams.

But the dreams have anomalies or oddities for the dreamer. Yosef and family were shepherds. He dreamt of sheaves bowing to him. Not what you would expect. What could that possibly mean? Now, we know what it means by the end of the story. The shepherd boy Yosef went to Egypt and became the custodian of the grain.

Paro is King of Egypt, the bread basket. Agriculture, not shepherding. The Nile flooded each year, soaking the earth. There are no famines in Egypt because of the



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reliability of the floods.

Paro has a dream of cows. That's odd, he thinks, because we are known for our grain not for cattle. And the cattle emerge from the marsh, the flooded fields from the natural flood irrigation of the Nile. Cows in the marsh is like a mixed metaphor; cows don't belong in the flooded fields.

Then he has a dream of grain. That makes more sense. But stalks of grain don't have teeth and a mouth to eat up other stalks.

Paro is restless, perplexed by the oddities of his dreams.



2ND ALIYA (41:15-38)

Paro relates the dreams to Yosef.

Yosef tells Paro that the 7 years of plenty will be followed by 7 years of famine. Now, Paro you shall appoint a wise person to hoard food during the plenty, to avoid the lands collapse during the famine. Paro responds: could one like this be found who has G-d's spirit in him?

Yosef seizes upon these anomalies. Eating is what cows do. Grain is agriculture. Remaining skinny, remaining parched?

It would never occur to Paro that his dream is of a famine because Egypt doesn't have famines. When there was a famine in Israel, Avraham went to Egypt. Because there was no famine in Egypt. Yitzchak, the same; a famine in the Land and so he was on his way to Egypt, though told not to go there.

Yosef assumes the reason that no one can interpret these dreams is because they are so outside of the realm of possibility. No Egyptian thinks of famines. I, Yosef surmises, I the outsider know plenty of famines.

So, I got it, he thinks. The marsh is the flooded fields, symbolic of agriculture. The skinny is famine. Years of plenty. Years of famine.

The name Elokim appears 7 times in this exchange between Yosef and Paro. When a word is repeated 7 times, it is a signal – take note, this is central. The story of Yosef's sale, his descent to Potiphar's home, his being framed by Mrs. Potiphar, thrown in jail, is a downward spiral designed by the hands of man. But all that is about to change, for G-d's Hand is entering the story.



3RD ALIYA (41:39-52)

Paro appoints Yosef over all of Egypt; he receives the signet ring, the royal clothes, rides the royal chariot, receives the Egyptian name Tzafnat Paneach and marries. He gathers the grain in the years of plenty. His 2 sons are born; Menashe, G-d has allowed me to forget my father's home and Ephraim, G-d has made me prosper in Egypt.

The juxtaposition in this aliya is beautiful in its meaning.

Yosef becomes Egyptian, the quintessential Egyptian. Royal robes. This is Yosef's 3rd robe story. First, his coat of many colors. Second, the robe Mrs. Potiphar held in her hand and framed him. Now, Egyptian royal robes. As if to say, I am assuming a new persona.

A new name, Tzafnat Paneach. A new identity.

Marries and has children. Marrying and children has been the core story of the legacy of Avraham until now. Who is part of the covenant and who not? Here, Yosef is building a family



with no legacy, no connection to that covenant.

He is a new man, in a new place, with a new name, a new wife and a new family. He names his children with this message; G-d has made me forget my family and to prosper in Egypt.

Of course, that is all bluff. He is feigning that he is forgetting his family and his G-d. You only say that you are forgetting your family if in fact you remember your family and your G-d. He *wants* to forget. But he can't.



4TH ALIYA (41:53-42:18)

The famine begins. Paro instructs his people to go to Yosef, for Yosef has opened the storehouses. Yaakov sends his sons, save Binyamin, to Egypt to get food. When the brothers bow to Yosef, he recognizes them. He remembers his dreams. Yosef challenges the brothers, claiming they are spying Egypt. To prove they are not, he demands they bring Binyamin. And puts them in jail for 3 days.

What did Yosef think when he saw the brothers? Why not say hello to them? Why hide? What an image: the Jew, successful, wildly successful, in the highest offices of his new land, with his new language, his new name, his new clothes, wanting to forget his family. He wants to forget the family and recognizes them.

They, the next aliya, blurt out that they are suffering because of Yosef. He who wants to forget his family recognizes them. They, who remember their brother, don't recognize him.



5TH ALIYA (42:19-43:15)

Yosef tells the brothers that one should stay behind while the rest return home and bring Binyamin to him. They respond to themselves; this has occurred because of how we treated Yosef.

Yosef cries upon hearing this. Shimon is jailed. Yosef places their money with their grain. When they discover this, they wonder why G-d is doing this. Yaakov is distressed at the thought of Binyamin leaving him. But when the food runs out, there is no choice. Yehuda guarantees Binyamin's safe return. They return and stand before Yosef.

The brother's feelings of guilt for the sale of Yosef persist even 20 years later. Over 20 years later, in Egypt, buying food – when things turn into a crisis, with Yosef demanding they bring Binyamin, the brothers immediately blurt out: we are getting our due for selling Yosef.

They have been waiting for calamity to befall them, knowing it will surely come. G-d is finally punishing us.

And what is with Yosef's capricious behavior? Yosef is repeatedly described as a definitive and successful man; in Potiphar's home, in the jail, and now as number 2 in the land. He is efficient and definitive.

Yet, here, he is capricious. First, he says to put them *all* in jail while one goes back to their father. Then he changes his mind; *one* stay in jail, *all* return.

Either Yosef is beside himself and winging it, not really knowing what to do. Or maybe the brothers are not the only ones subject to the Divine. They are being punished. Yosef, manipulated. Maybe Yosef too is a puppet in the Divine Hands – he makes a move, and He puts into his head something different. In order to bring the Jews to Egypt.



6TH ALIYA (43:16-29)

The brothers receive a royal welcome from Yosef upon their return with Binyamin. They apologize for the money they found in their grain sacks. Yosef tells them not to worry for their G-d has

given them a gift. The brothers are treated to a fine dinner. Yosef inquires of their father and sees Binyamin.

Binyamin is Yosef's brother, the only other born from Rachel. Binyamin was very young when Yosef was sold. This is 22 years later. Yosef would not recognize Binyamin. The aliya ends on a pregnant note – he sees Binyamin – and then what? The aliya ends, leaving us hanging.



7TH ALIYA (43:30-44:17)

Yosef sits the brothers in the order of their birth. They are surprised. Their sacks are packed with grain, their money returned. And Yosef's goblet planted in the sack of Binyamin. No sooner had they left, Yosef orders the guards to pursue. The goblet is found in the sack of Binyamin. They return to Yosef. Yehuda offers that they all stay as slaves. Yosef demurs; the thief alone shall be a slave. The rest of you return home in peace to your father.

Yosef has planted the cup in the sack of Binyamin. We have had another story of travelers, returning home to the Land of Israel, who are accused of having stolen from their host. Rachel. Binyamin's mother, who died in childbirth with him. She stole the idols from her father, hid them under her. Here, he son is accused of stealing from his host, hiding it in his bag of food.

What is striking in the story is the absence of the Divine. There is no Guiding Voice. No revelation. In a sense, Breishit is the story of man's struggle to figure out where and when the Divine Hand is present. Sefer Shemot will change that completely; the Divine is overt, present, instructing, controlling. Here, man is fumbling along, making mistakes, guilty, trying to figure out where the Divine is Present. Sometimes they get it right. And sometimes not.

**Reminder that we read from three
Sefrei Torah this Shabbat in honor
of Rosh Chodesh and Chanukah**

SHABBAT CHANUKAH HAFTORAH: ZECHARIA 2:14 - 4:7

The special haftorah for Chanukah contains the glorious vision of the golden Temple Menorah.

This hafotrah's unique message was prophesied by Zecharia in close proximity to the building of the second Beit Hamikdash. Within this context this exquisite passage describes the exuberant joy that will prevail when Hashem's presence returns to Yerushalayim.

Hashem, in Zecharia's prophecy, proceeds to articulate the great reward awaiting Yehoshua, the first Kohen Gadol to serve in the second Beit Hamikdash, if he and his descendants follow the ways of the Torah. The reward will be: "Behold! I will bring My Servant, the Shoot." This is an allusion to the Mashiach, the 'shoot', the descendant of David.

Zecharia then powerfully witnesses in his mind's eye a golden seven-branched Menorah. An angel offers an explanation of the vision: "This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbavel - 'Not by force and not by physical might, by my spirit,' says the Lord of Hosts."

With these words the Navi conveys a message of hope and the promise that the redemption will surely arrive. The light off the Menorah is a symbol of God's *shechina*, His holy presence, that will soon be manifest in the land of Israel and will ultimately be visible for all humanity to behold. May that day come soon! ■