



## Parshas Vayeshev

For the week ending 21 Kislev 5758  
19 & 20 December 1997

### Overview

**Y**aakov Avinu settles in the land of Canaan. His favorite son, Yosef, brings him critical reports about his brothers. Yaakov makes for 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. Yehuda persuades the brothers to take Yosef out of the pit and sell him to a caravan of passing Yishmaelim. When Reuven returns to find the pit empty, he rends his clothes in anguish. The brothers soak Yosef's tunic in goat's blood and show it to their father Yaakov, who assumes that Yosef has been devoured by a wild animal. Yaakov is inconsolable. Meanwhile, in Egypt, Yosef has been sold to Potiphar, Pharaoh's Chamberlain of the Butchers. In the Parsha's sub-plot, Yehuda's son Er dies as punishment for preventing his wife Tamar from becoming pregnant because he feared that she would lose her beauty. Onan, Yehuda's second son, then weds Tamar by levirate marriage. He too is punished in circumstances similar to those of his brother. 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 of her, she slanders Yosef, falsely accusing him of attempting to seduce her, and he is imprisoned. While in jail, Yosef successfully predicts the outcome of the dream of Pharaoh's wine steward, who is re-instated; and the dream of Pharaoh's baker, who is hanged. In spite of his promise, the wine steward forgets to help Yosef after he is released, and Yosef languishes in jail.

### Insights

#### TIME FLIES

**“Yosef, at the age of seventeen ... but he was a youth.” (37:2)**

Have you noticed that the older you get, the quicker everything thing seems to go? Birthdays seem about nine months apart. Pesach gets closer to Succos every year. It seems as though our perception of the passage of time is proportional to the span of our years.

When you're young, a day seems forever, and a week is beyond measurement. It's difficult to tell children to be patient because for them time has an entirely different reality. How many times do we buy the kids a present and say “Wait till we get home before you open it!” When we get home we find the wrapping is all over the back of the car.

Rashi comments on the above verse that being “a youth” means that Yosef would “fix his hair.” Can it be that Yosef the Tzadik was so vain? Or is Rashi hinting to something deeper?

A king is obliged to have a haircut every day, in keeping with the dignity of his station in life. Yosef knew through prophecy that he would one day be a king, and in the impatience of youth, he couldn't wait for the prophecy to come true, so he “fixed his hair,” trying, as it were, to hurry that moment closer by going through the motions of kingship.

Ironically, when he eventually becomes a king in Egypt, it is not he who gives himself a haircut, but others.

As much as we may try to force events in our impetuosity, to every thing there is a time and a place and a season under Heaven.

#### WHEN HALF OF TWO IS ZERO

**Yosef said to the Chamberlain of the Cupbearers: “If only you would think of me... and you will do me a kindness, if you please, and mention me to Pharaoh, then you would get me out of this building.” (40:14)**

Every Rosh Hashana, all those who have come to this world pass before the King of Kings like sheep. One at a time, we are judged. The entire following year is decided at that moment.

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If everything is decided on Rosh Hashana and sealed on Yom Kippur, why should I bother to go out to work? If everything's decided anyway, why don't I just stay in bed and eat chocolates, and let my pay check arrive in the mail?

Even though all our needs are met miraculously, Hashem requires that we make an effort, that we do *hishtadlus*. The essential reason is so that we may cover up the miracle of G-d's providing for us. By making an effort, we make it *look* like our livelihood is a result of natural forces.

We must never think that this effort has any connection with the results it seems to bring. If I get to work a little earlier and the sales figures show an increase, I shouldn't let myself think that my early mornings were the cause. Rather, everything at every moment is sent to me from Heaven.

But how much effort is called *hishtadlus* and how much betrays a lack of faith?

Yosef asked the Chamberlain of the Cupbearers twice to intercede on his behalf to Pharaoh. By his lack of trust in Hashem by asking the Chamberlain twice, Yosef languished in jail for two further years.

Rabbi Chaim Brisker once asked Rabbi Shimon Shkop how long Yosef would have been kept in prison if he had only asked the Chamberlain *once* to help secure his release.

Rabbi Shimon replied that had Yosef only asked once, he would have only spent one year in prison.

Rabbi Chaim disagreed. "He wouldn't have had to spend any more time in prison at all. To try to secure his release by asking once is considered to be *hishtadlus* — the human effort that Hashem expects of each of us. To ask twice showed a lack of trust in Hashem. So it would have been two years or nothing."

#### SPEAKING BETWEEN THE LINES

**"...and Yosef would bring evil reports about them (his brothers) to their father." (37:2)**

Next to Everest, even K2 pales by comparison.

How could it be that Yosef HaTzadik — *Yosef the Righteous* — could have spoken evil about his brothers?

When a father looks at his children, and notices that one is exemplary, necessarily this forces the other children to conform to that example. And, the others will be judged lacking to the degree that they fall short of their sibling.

"Why can't you be like your brother — now that's the way a person should behave!"

It wasn't that Yosef actually *spoke* evil about his brothers, rather that **his excellence was like a silent accusation against them**. For however elevated the brothers may have been in ultimate terms, comparatively they were not on Yosef's level.

And comparison always makes the lesser seem inadequate.

Next to Everest even K2 pales.

If this was the case, and Yosef didn't actually accuse them, then why was he punished?

The more righteous a person is, the greater is his obligation to conceal his righteousness — even from his father.

## Haftorah: Amos 2:6-3:8

### COSMIC CONSEQUENCES

**"Only you have I loved of all the families of the earth, therefore will I recall upon you all your iniquities." (3:2)**

Take two students. One talented and full of promise, the other slow-witted and delinquent. You catch them both cheating in exams. Which of the two is liable to get the greater punishment?

Even though other nations have certainly deserved punishment more, the Jewish people have suffered Hashem's punishment more than any other people.

Privilege has no meaning without responsibility.

The Jewish People are supposed to be the "star pupil" in life's classroom. For their sake, the world was created. They have been chosen to be a sign to all peoples. Israel is the heartbeat of the world, and therefore, necessarily, its responsibility is greater.

When the Jewish people sin, they blemish the whole creation, and therefore they are judged more exactly — because, even though their small infractions may seem insignificant, the consequences are cosmic.

Sources:

- *Time Flies* - Rabbi Shimon Schwab as heard from Rabbi C.Z. Senter
- *Speaking Between The Lines* - Admor R' Menachem MiAmshinov in *Iturei Torah*

*Cosmic Consequences* - *Mayana shel Torah*

## LOVE OF THE LAND

Selections from classical Torah sources which express the special relationship between the People of Israel and Eretz Yisrael



### FIRST IN CREATION, FIRST IN IMPORTANCE

*Eretz Yisrael* was created first and afterwards the rest of the world, as the passage states (*Mishlei 8:26*): "Before He made *Eretz* (land) and *Chutzos* (outlying areas)."

The term "*Eretz*" applies to *Eretz Yisrael* which was the main purpose of creation and therefore created first. All the other lands are considered secondary in importance as they were in the sequence of creation and are therefore referred to as "*Chutzos*."

Even today we refer to the land we love simply as "*Eretz*" while the rest of the world is "*Chutz*," outlying areas of secondary importance.

*Ta'anis 10a*

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