
THE TANACH STUDY CENTER www.tanach.org
In Memory of Rabbi Abraham Leibtag
Questions for self study - by Menachem Leibtag

PARSHAT MIKETZ

PART I - QUESTIONS FOR THE 'SHABBOS TABLE'

DREAM PARALLELS

1. In what manner are Pharaoh's dreams similar to Yosef's dreams (at the beginning of Parshat Vayeshev)? [Note primarily their 'double' nature, and how they relate to agricultural prosperity. Note as well how they relate to Breishit 27:28-29.]

In what manner were they similar to the dreams of the "sar ha'mashkim" and "sar ha'ofim" [the butler and baker]?

In what manner did Yosef's own dreams enable him to interpret Pharaoh's dream?

Can you suggest a thematic parallel as well?

2. Note that all of Parshat Miketz is included in one 'parshia' [i.e. there are no 'parshia' breaks until the very end]. Note also that the same was true for Parshat Vayetzeh. Is there anything else similar about these two Parshiot?

Can you suggest a reason for this?

[Relate to the dreams, and their position in each Parsha.]

SPEAKING OF 'GOD'

3. Notice in the entire Parsha how often Yosef speaks of 'Elokim' in most all of his conversations.

See for example in Yosef's conversation with Pharaoh concerning his dreams in 41:16,25,28,32. Note as well Pharaoh's response in 41:38-39!

[Note also how Yosef names his children - 41:51-52.]

Finally, note how Yosef speaks to his brothers [pretending not to be Yosef, but rather an Egyptian official!] in 42:18 & 43:23,29. Note as well Yehuda's statement to Yosef in 44:16.

In your opinion, and based on these psukim, what 'god' or 'God' does this shem Elokim (that they all talk about) refer to?

Did the Egyptians believe in God?

If so, is it the same God that Yaakov's family believes in?

If not, what then do they mean when they mention (or understand when they hear) the name 'Elokim'?

[Relate as well to 20:11, Shmot 1:17 and Devarim 25:18!]

A 'HIDDEN' CONNECTION

4. As you study Parshat Miketz, note the numerous 'textual' parallels with the narrative of Megillat Esther.

Would it be logical to assume that the author of Megillat Esther uses those parallel phrases intentionally? If so, what do you think is being alluded to by these parallels?

In what manner is God involved behind the events of both stories?

PART II - QUESTIONS FOR PREPARATION

For shiur on topic: Yosef the 'dreamer' or the 'leader'

[First, a review of relevant topics from Parshat Vayeshev]

DREAMS & BLESSINGS

1. In your opinion, do Yosef's dreams imply that he was destined to become the only 'chosen son' (i.e. just as Yaakov was chosen over Esav, and Yitzchak over Yishmael); or that all of Yaakov's children were to be chosen, but Yosef was destined to become the family 'leader'? On what do you base your answer?

2. Review Yosef's dreams in 37:5-10, and compare them to Yitzchak's blessing of Yaakov [intended for Esav] in 27:28-29.

In what manner are they similar? Based on this similarity, what conclusions could the brothers have arrived at after hearing

these dreams? How may Yaakov's treatment of Yosef have added to the brothers' fears? [Relate to 37:18-20 & 37:23.]

In your opinion, did Yosef (when he was still 17) have his own interpretation of his dreams, or did he simply 'share' them with his family (unaware of their deeper meaning)?

What was Yaakov's reaction to those dreams? In your opinion, did he 'believe' in their message? What reason would there be to doubt that they were indeed "nevuah"?

Based on your answers to these questions, do the brothers have ample reason to believe that Yaakov is making a mistake by favoring Yosef? If so, do they have a precedent for 'interfering' in this process of who will be chosen?

[In other words, is there a 'precedent' for 'intervention' in the 'bechira' process - in regard to 'who' will be chosen?

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[Now, for Parshat Miketz]

WRITING HOME

3. Note that after Yosef is sold, he quickly rises to a high position in the house of Potiphar; and later on, he rises to the highest position in Egypt. With this in mind, can you explain why Yosef never makes any effort to contact his father, or at least send a letter home (or a messenger) to inform his father that he is well and alive?

Does he have any reason why not to contact home?

If so, is it 'personal' or 'prophetic'? [Explain your answer.]

In your answer, relate as well to his father's age, and his previous 'life experience' with his brothers.

4. To the best of your recollection, when Yosef first sees his brothers (some twenty years after he was sold, i.e. when they come to Egypt to buy grain), why doesn't he immediately tell them who he is?

If his goal is simply to hide his identity from them, then certainly he could have someone else deal with their purchase. Therefore, there must be a goal behind his confrontation with them, while hiding his identity. If your opinion, what is his goal?

In your opinion, did he never plan to reveal himself, but only wanted to 'tease' them - but broke down in the process.

Or, did he plan to reveal himself to his brothers only if he would find out certain information about them, e.g. - only if was certain that his father was indeed alive?

Or did he always plan to reveal himself, but was just waiting for the 'proper moment'? If so, what was Yosef waiting for; and what was he trying to accomplish in the interim?

5. Carefully review the events of Yosef's first meeting with his brothers as they are recorded in 42:1-28. As you study those psukim, attempt to understand each step that Yosef takes, and how the 'remembering of his dreams' (see 42:9) affects his actions.

Had it not been for his dreams, do you think that Yosef would have (a) immediately identified himself to his brothers; or (b) totally ignored them; or (c) acted in the same (or similar) manner?

[In other words, how much do his dreams affect his actions?]

6. Review 42:9, noting how the Torah informs us that 'Yosef remembered his dreams'. In your opinion, does the pasuk imply that Yosef had 'forgotten' his dreams until this point in time and **now** remembers them, or that Yosef had never forgotten his dreams during his years in Egypt, and therefore now realizes that they have partially come true!

Now, see Rashi & Ramban on 42:9, where they deal with this specific question! How would they answer it?

This Ramban is quite lengthy, but important to read. In your opinion, does Ramban explain Yosef's behavior during the entire time since he was sold, or only from the time when his brothers come to buy food?

In your opinion, does Ramban's answer make sense?

If not, can you provide any other explanation for Yosef's behavior in this chapter?

7. In last week's shiur, we raised the possibility that the brothers may never have sold Yosef, and presumed that he was dead; while Yosef thought that he was either sold by them, or because of them. How would that possibility affect your understanding of the events that transpire in chapter 42?

In your opinion, does Yosef know that Yaakov (and most probably his brothers) think that he is dead? If he assumes that they think that he is alive, and was sold via the Midyanim or Yishmaelim to Egypt, should he expect that someone would have come to 'redeem' him for that purchase?

During his interrogation of his brothers, do the brothers ever admit that Yosef was sold, or do they just say that he was 'missing'? Relate this to your answer to this question.

8. Is there any way that Yosef could know what his father thinks (or knows) concerning his fate? Does Yosef have any idea that his brothers first wanted to kill him?

Finally, if the Yishmaelim are indeed 'international traders' who often travel through Eretz Canaan to (& fro) Egypt, would it have been possible for the brothers to look for Yosef and trace his sale and whereabouts?

Taking the above questions into consideration, attempt to suggest several explanations for why Yosef may never have contacted home.

9. When Yosef first sees his brothers, he immediately accuses them of being spies (see 42:8-10). Considering that Yosef would certainly like to find out family information from his brothers; while keeping his identity hidden, explain how his 'spy accusation' solves this problem.

In your opinion, had Yosef heard from his brothers that his father had died, would he have ever revealed himself to them?

Does Yosef have reason to assume that Yaakov is dead? Similarly, what does Yosef probably assume in regard to the fate of Binyamin (considering that he is not with his brothers)? Relate this to your answer to the above question.

10. In your opinion, could it be that Yosef is simply acting impulsively [possibly in anger], or is this accusation part of a 'master plan'?

If Yosef does have a 'master plan', what is it, and what is its goal and purpose? [Is Yosef the type of character who was constantly planning ahead? If so, bring examples (they are not hard to find!).]

According to Yosef's 'plan', (in your opinion) does he definitely plan to sooner or later reveal himself - and hence his various actions will help him determine the 'proper' time to do so; or is Yosef not sure whether or not he should reveal himself - and hence his actions are designed to help him arrive at that decision?

11. Whatever your conclusion was concerning Yosef's plan (or lack of one), make sure that your answer explains each action that Yosef takes from the time he first sees his brothers until he finally reveals himself in Parshat Vayigash. While doing so, be sure that you can answer the following questions.

Why does Yosef give his brothers their money back?

Why does he hide the cup in Binyamin's bag?

Why doesn't he reveal himself once the brothers confess that they have sinned (see 42:21 & 44:16)? [What else could he possibly be waiting for?]

Why doesn't he accept Yehuda's offer that he (and his brothers) become servants (see 44:16-17).

12. When Yosef finally does 'break down' (see 45:1-3) and reveals himself to his brothers, was it:

a) 'premature', i.e. he simply couldn't wait anymore - or

b) because his plan had 'worked' - if so what was his plan - or

c) because he just heard something he had never realized?

13. From the Torah's account of this story, does it appear that one of Yosef's goals may be for his brothers to repent for their sin?

Attempt to find support for this assumption? [See Abrabanel on 41:54 question #4, and his answer in 42:7.] Does this assumption explain all of Yosef's actions?

If indeed Yosef is waiting for his brothers to repent, why isn't their repentance, as described in 42:21 & 44:16, sufficient?

14. Similarly, one could suggest that Yosef's plan is to fulfill his dreams. [See Ramban on 42:9.] Does this assumption explain Yosef's behavior throughout this entire incident?

Is it possible for **all** of his dreams to come true?

Is it logical that Yosef's dreams must come true specifically in a situation where the brothers and father bow down to him while not knowing who Yosef really is? If so, explain why!

If a person has a certain dream, does it become his responsibility to make sure that it comes true? If so, is he permitted to transgress any laws (or moral responsibilities) in order to ensure that his dream comes true?

15. If you have ample time, see as well the commentaries of the Netziv (in Emek Davar) and Rav Hirsch on 42:9.

16. In your opinion, is Yosef 'ethically correct' in his treatment of his brothers - or should he have revealed himself immediately as soon as his brothers first arrived, to provide his aging father with 'good tidings'?

What do think would have happened had he done so? How would have that affected the nature of his future relationship with his brothers?

17. Does Yosef behavior in these events reflect certain 'positive' leadership traits as well? If so, what are they?

What can we learn from this entire incident of Yosef and his brothers, especially in regard to the future leadership of Am Yisrael and the relationships among the twelve tribes?

PART III - PARSHANUT

A. RECOGNIZING YOSEF

1. Review 42:5-8, while noting that psukim 42:7 and 42:8 both mention that Yosef 'recognized' ['va-yaker'] his brothers.

In your opinion is 42:8 simply a repetition of the same point, or does the second va-yaker add something?

If so, what does it add?

If not, why is it repeated?

2. With this in mind, see Ibn Ezra on 42:8, as well as Seforno & Ramban (towards the end). How do they solve this problem? [How does this Ramban relate to Rashi's peirush of this pasuk?]

3. Next, see Rasag [who claims: "va-yaker et echav be-**va'da'ut**"] How is this peirush different than Ibn Ezra & Ramban's?

4. See Radak's explanation of va-yaker. How is his explanation different than everyone else's?

Does this explain why va-yaker is mentioned twice?

B. TZ)FNAT PA'ANEACH

1. Note the new name that Pharaoh gives Yosef in 41:45. In your opinion, is this name Hebrew or Egyptian? According to either possibility, what does this name mean? [Is Pharaoh familiar with the language that was spoken by Yosef in Canaan?]

Now see Rashi [and Rasa"q]. How do they answer this question, and what is the meaning of this name, i.e. how does it relate to Yosef's interpretations of dreams? Then see Ibn Ezra, noting how and why he disagrees. See also Rashbam - how is his commentary similar to Ibn Ezra, and how is it different?

2. Next, see Radak, noting his question on Rashi's interpretation. Afterward, see Ramban, noting how he relates to both Rashi and Ibn Ezra, and how he tries to resolve this problem. What does Ramban assume re: Pharaoh's knowledge of other languages, and in regard to how names are translated in Chumash?

C. WHO WAS OSNAT?

1. Review 41:44-45, noting how Pharaoh gave Osnat the daughter of Poti-phera to Yosef as a wife.

In your opinion, is this Poti-phera the same person as Potiphar, Yosef's first master (see 39:1 and ensuing story)?

Explain why yes or why not. Relate to both Potiphar's name and title, as well as to his position.

2. If this was indeed the same person, how would this relate to the story of why Potiphar originally sent Yosef to prison?

3. Let's take a look at how the commentators related to these questions:

See Rashi. Note how Rashi explains why he is the same person, and the nature of the slight change in name. What description of Potiphar in 39:1 does Rashi base his commentary on?

4. Next, see Rashbam, noting how he argues with Rashi. What description of Potiphar in 39:1 does Rashbam base his commentary on?

5. Then see Ramban, noting how he supports Rashi's opinion, but adds some additional explanations to resolve the differences between 39:1 and 41:45. [Note how Ramban builds an entire story of may have transpired in the meantime.]

6. Finally, see Chizkuni, noting how he explains like Rashi, but adds some interesting reasons for why this was a 'perfect shidduch'. Note as well Chizkuni's additional explanation that Osnat may have been Dina bat Yaakov's daughter!

What 'problem' does this Midrash solve?

be-hatzlacha,
menachem