

Parsha Q&A



Parshas Miketz

For the week ending 30 Kislev 5759
18 & 19 December 1998

Parsha Questions

1. What was symbolized by the fat cows being eaten?
2. How did Pharaoh's recollection of his dream differ from Nevuchadnetzar's recollection of his dream?
3. What was significant about the fact that Pharaoh dreamed repeatedly?
4. Pharaoh gave Yosef the name "Tsafnas Panayach." What did that name mean?
5. What happened to the Egyptians' grain that was stored in anticipation of the famine?
6. What did Yosef require the Egyptians to do before he would sell them grain?
7. Did Yaakov and his family still have food when he sent his sons to Egypt? If yes, why did he send them?
8. What prophetic significance lay in Yaakov's choice of the word "redu" — "descend" (and not "lechu" — "go")?
9. Why does the verse say "Yosef's brothers" went down to Egypt (and not "Yaakov's sons")?
10. When did Yosef know that his dreams were being fulfilled?
11. Under what pretext did Yosef accuse his brothers of being spies?
12. Why did the brothers enter the city through different gates?
13. Who was the interpreter between Yosef and his brothers?
14. Why did Yosef specifically choose Shimon to put in prison?
15. How does the verse indicate the Shimon was released from prison after his brothers left?
16. What was Yaakov implying when he said to his sons: "I am the one whom you bereaved?"
17. How did Reuven try to persuade Yaakov to send Binyamin to Egypt?
18. How long did it take for Yaakov and family to eat all the food that the brothers brought back from Egypt? Give the answer in terms of travel time.
19. How much more money did the brothers bring on their second journey than they brought on the first journey? Why?
20. When the brothers were accused of stealing Yosef's silver goblet, they refuted the claim with the logical principle known as kal v'chomer. What did they say?

Sherlox Holmes and the Mystery In-Law

Watstein scratched his head: "What do you think of this, Mr. Holmes?" said Watstein. "The verse says: 'And he (Pharaoh) gave him Osnas, daughter of Poti Fera the Priest of On, as a wife.' (41:45) Rashi says that Poti Fera was really Potifar, Yosef's former master."

"I think that's lovely!" said world famous detective Sherlock Holmes. "Yosef's enemy becomes his beloved father-in-law! Sadly, in far too many families the opposite is the case."

"But what forces Rashi to say this? From a simple reading, Potifar and Poti Fera were two different people. Potifar was the chief butcher while Poti Fera was Priest of On. Furthermore, they have different names! Their names may sound alike, but so what? Dozens of people in Tanach share similar sounding names, such as Shalah and Shelah (Bereishis 10:24), Yishva and Yishvi (Bereishis 46:16). So I ask you, where does Rashi see an indication in the text hinting that Potifar and Poti Fera were the same person?"

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Answer

“The verse says that Pharaoh gave Osnas to Yosef as a wife. Why was it Pharaoh himself who gave her as a wife?” asked Sherlock.

“What do you mean?” asked Watstein.

“Wasn’t it generally accepted back then that the father gave his daughter in marriage? Surely Poti Fera, Osnas’ father, should have been party to the decision? Why was it Pharaoh who gave her in marriage?” asked Sherlock.

“I see,” said Watstein. “Well, perhaps Poti Fera objected, but Pharaoh, being the despot he was, could force the marriage despite the father’s objection.”

“But what father in his right mind would oppose such a match!” said Sherlock. “Yosef was the most handsome, wise, and powerful person in Egypt! He made Prince Charming look like the Hunchback of Notre Dame.”

“I see your point,” said Watstein. “Since the verse emphasizes that Pharaoh gave Osnas in marriage, it implies that her father opposed the match. Only one person in all Egypt would oppose such a match: Potifar! Potifar’s wife, with her slanderous accusations, might have soured Potifar from wanting any future relationship with Yosef.”

(Based on Maskil L’David; Sherlock” is by Reuven Subar, inspired by Dr. Avigdor Bonchek’s “What’s Bothering Rashi”)

I Did Not Know That!

Pharaoh’s dream had five indications that it was a true portent of the future:

- It was a repeated dream (once with cows, once with wheat).
- It was a dream explained within a dream — i.e., the vision of wheat explained the vision of cows: Wheat clearly represents the harvest, which clarified that the cows represented plowing, the first step towards harvest.
- He dreamed it close to morning.
- During the dream, Pharaoh experienced it as real; he didn’t realize it was a dream until he woke up.
- Pharaoh was disturbed by the dream even after waking.

Malbim

Answers to this Week’s Questions

All references are to the verses and Rashi’s commentary, unless otherwise stated

1. 41:4 - That all the joy of the plentiful years would be forgotten. (*Not* that the good years would provide food during the bad years.)
2. 41:8 - Pharaoh remembered the contents of his dream but didn’t know its meaning. Nevuchadnetzar forgot even the contents of his dream.
3. 41:32 - It showed that the seven good years would start immediately.
4. 41:45 - He who explains things that are hidden and obscure.
5. 41:55 - It rotted.
6. 41:55 - Become circumcised.
7. 42:1 - Yes, but he sent them because he did not want to cause envy in the eyes of those who did not have food.
8. 42:2 - It hinted to the 210 years that the Jewish people would be in Egypt: The word “*redu*” has the numerical value of 210.
9. 42:3 - Because they regretted selling Yosef and planned to act as brothers by trying to find him and ransom him at any cost.
10. 42:9 - When his brothers bowed to him.
11. 42:12 - They entered the city through ten different gates rather than through one gate.
12. 42:13 - To search for Yosef throughout the city.
13. 42:23 - His son Menashe.
14. 42:24 - Because he was the one who cast Yosef into the pit, and he was the one who said, “Here comes the dreamer.” Alternatively, to separate him from Levi, because together they posed a danger to Yosef.
15. 42:24 - The verse says that Shimon was bound “in front of their eyes,” implying that he was bound only while in their sight, but that when they left he was released.
16. 42:36 - That he suspected them of having slain or sold Shimon, and that they may have done the same to Yosef.
17. 42:37 - Reuven said: “You can kill my two sons if I fail to bring Binyamin back to you.”
18. 43:2,10 - Twice the travel time to and from Egypt.
19. 43:12 - Three times as much. This enabled them to repay the money they found in their sacks and to buy more food even if the price of food had doubled.
20. 44:8 - They said “Look, we returned the money we found in our sacks; therefore, how can it be that we would actually steal from you?”