

Parsha Q&A



Parshas Vayeshev

For the week ending 23 Kislev 5759
11 & 12 December 1998

Parsha Questions

1. "These are the offspring of Yaakov: Yosef..." Give three reasons why Yosef is considered Yaakov's main offspring.
2. What was praiseworthy about the fact that Yosef's brothers did not speak to him in a friendly manner?
3. How do we see from Yosef's dream about the sun, moon and stars that all dreams contain some untrue element?
4. Who brought Yosef down to Egypt?
5. Where was Reuven when Yosef was sold?
6. In addition to the brothers, who else knew that Yosef was alive?
7. Why didn't Hashem reveal prophetically to Yaakov that Yosef was alive?
8. For how long did Yaakov mourn the loss of Yosef?
9. Verse 37:35 states "his father wept." To whom does this refer?
10. Who was Tamar's father?
11. In what merit did Tamar deserve to have kings as her descendants?
12. Why is the word "hand" mentioned four times in connection to the birth of Zerach?
13. Why does the Torah relate the incident with Potiphar's wife immediately after the incident of Yehuda and Tamar?
14. How did Potiphar "see" that Hashem was with Yosef?
15. Who in this week's Parsha pretended to be sick?
16. Why were the butler and the baker imprisoned?
17. For how long were the butler and the baker in prison?
18. How did the baker know that Yosef had correctly interpreted the butler's dream?
19. What prompted the butler and baker to tell Yosef their dreams?
20. How was Yosef punished for asking the butler for help?

Sherlox Holmes and the Lost and Found Mystery

"People ask how I always seem to find the clues to solve a mystery," said world famous detective Sherlock Holmes. "The truth is, you don't find clues. You simply observe, and the clues find you."

"Speaking of finding," said Watstein, "perhaps you can explain this text about the mysterious stranger who finds Yosef. When Yosef couldn't find his brothers in Shechem, the verse tells us that 'a man found him...' (Bereishis 37:15) and told him that his brothers had moved on to a city called Dosan. Thus, Yosef was able to find his brothers, leading to the fateful incident in which they sold him as a slave."

"What luck! Or, rather, what un-luck!" said Sherlock.

"Rashi says that this 'man' who found Yosef was in fact an angel, the angel Gabriel!"

"Ah," said Sherlock, "So it wasn't 'luck' after all."

"But what's wrong with the verse as it stands: 'A man found him?' Why can't this 'man' be just a man, an everyday, ordinary man? Why does Rashi insist that it was a supernatural agent?"

"Merely observe, dear Watstein, and the clues find you."

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Parshas Vayeshev — 23 Kislev 5759, 11 & 12 December 1998

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Answer

“Was Yosef the finder, or the found?” asked Sherlock.

“What do you mean?” asked Watstein.

“Yosef was seeking his brothers when he ‘chanced’ upon an anonymous stranger. Yet the text says that the stranger found Yosef. Was the stranger looking for Yosef?”

“Hmm, that is odd,” said Watstein. “Since Yosef was the seeker, it should have said that Yosef found a man, not that a man found Yosef.”

“Exactly,” said Sherlock. “By saying that a total stranger found Yosef, the verse implies that the stranger was looking for Yosef. This makes no sense, for the stranger had no dealings with Yosef, so why should he look for him?”

“So it couldn’t have been a human!” said Watstein. “What human would seek out someone in order to give him directions, not even knowing what that person’s mission was, or where that person was going? Rather, it must have been a supernatural being, on a Divine mission to ensure that Yosef reached his intended destination!”

“You are quite a find, Dr. Watstein.”

(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!

“Reuven said: ‘Cast him (Yosef) into this pit in the desert; do not actually kill him;’ (Reuven said this) in order to save him from them and bring him back to his father (Yaakov).” (37:21-2)

When a person does a mitzvah, he should do it with a full heart and with joy; for had Reuven known that his good intentions would be eternally inscribed in the Torah, Reuven would have hoisted Yosef upon his shoulders and carried him home to his father.

Rus Rabba 5, Tanchuma Vayikra 25:665

Recommended Reading List

Ramban

37:2	The Evil Report
37:10	The Moon
38:24	Tamar’s Punishment

Sforno

37:2	The Evil Report
37:3	Yosef’s Coat
37:18	The Brothers’ Concern
38:1	Yehuda’s Punishment
39:19	Why Yosef was Imprisoned

Answers to this Week’s Questions

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

- 37:2 - (a) Yosef was the son of Rachel, Yaakov’s primary wife. (b) Yosef looked like Yaakov. (c) All that befell Yaakov befell Yosef.
- 37:4 - They did not act hypocritically.
- 37:10 - The moon represented Rachel. Since she had already died, it was impossible for that element of the dream to come true.
- 37:28 - A caravan of Midianites.
- 37:29 - He was attending to Yaakov.
- 37:33 - Yitzchak.
- 37:33 - Because the brothers had issued a ban against revealing the truth to Yaakov, and Hashem, so to speak, abided by their ban.
- 37:34 - Twenty-two years.
- 37:35 - Yitzchak, who wept because of Yaakov’s suffering.
- 38:24 - Shem.
- 38:26 - In the merit of her modesty.
- 38:30 - To allude to his descendent, Achan, who sinned with his hand by taking four things from the spoils of Jericho.
- 39:1 - To teach us that just as Tamar acted with pure motives, so did Potiphar’s wife.
- 39:3 - Yosef mentioned Hashem’s name frequently in his speech.
- 39:11 - Potiphar’s wife.
- 40:1 - The butler was imprisoned because a fly was found in the king’s goblet, and the baker was imprisoned because a pebble was found in the king’s bread.
- 40:4 - Twelve months.
- 40:5 - The baker dreamed the interpretation of the butler’s dream.
- 40:6 - Yosef asked them why they looked troubled.
- 40:23 - He remained in prison an additional two years.