

Rabbi Elchanan Shoff

PARSHAS MIKETZ

And the butler spoke to Pharaoh saying, 'I mention my sins today...' (Gen. 41:9). The word “sins” (אֲשָׁמוּנִים) is in plural form instead of in singular form (אֲשָׁמוּנִי). Why does it say “sins”, if the only sin that we know of the butler committing is allowing a fly to be in the king’s cup (see Rashi to Gen. 40:1)? Rabbi Moshe Sofer (*Chasam Sofer al HaTorah* p. 205) offers two ways of explaining how the butler is responsible for more than one “sin”. Firstly, he explains that compounded to the sin of the butler failing to ensure the cleanliness of Pharaoh’s drink, the butler is also guilty of the sin of “forgetting” about Yosef. When Yosef interpreted the butler’s dream favorably and foretold that the butler would be reinstated, Yosef asked him to remember him and try help him get out of jail. However, the butler instead “forgot” about Yosef. At this juncture, when the issue of Pharaoh’s dream came up, the butler admitted to Pharaoh that he has incurred two “sins”, one against the Pharaoh, and one against Yosef. Alternatively, Chasam Sofer explains that Hashem does not allow wicked people to be His agents in bringing good to righteous people, unless that wicked person gains some sort of personal benefit, as well. Here, the butler suddenly remembered about his commitment to helping Yosef. This reminded him of the fact that until now he was unable to be God’s agent in saving Yosef because he himself was a wicked person and Hashem does not use wicked people as his agents in bringing good to *tzadikim*. Because of this, the butler mentions his two “sins”, one against the Pharaoh, and one against Hashem.

And they hurried him from the pit (Gen. 41:14). Why did they have to fetch Yosef from the jail-pit with such haste? The Sforno explains that this serves to teach us that when the Final Redemption will happen, it will transpire quite suddenly. The salvation from Hashem comes in a split-moment. This is also why the Jewish People in the Exodus were hurried out of Egypt. This idea is also found in the Talmud (*Sanhedrin* 98a) which says that the Messiah sits amongst lepers who are tending to their wounds. Each of the lepers would remove four or five bandages at a time to clean themselves and then place new bandages over their wounds, but the Messiah would only expose one wound at a time and then clean it and cover it. The Talmud explains that this is because the Messiah understands that any moment he might be called up to bring the Final Redemption, and if he has multiple wounds exposed, it will take him more time to be ready. Rabbi Avraham Chaim Schorr (*Toras Chaim* there) explains that the Messiah cannot be delayed even one moment, because the proper time of his arrival might be a generation which is completely guilty—once the Jewish People reach that stage, the Messiah must arrive immediately, with no delay. Rabbi Elchanan Wasserman (*Kovetz Maamrim*, p. 45) explains that since according to the Kabbalists, the Jewish People at the time of the Exodus had reached the 49th level of impurity; this is why

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they had to leave in such a rush, so that they do not fall to the 50th level of impurity from which return is impossible; so too at the time of the redemption such speed will be required too!

And Pharaoh sent [messengers] and he called [for] Yosef, and they hurried him from the pit, and he cut his hair and he changed his clothes, and he came to Pharaoh (Gen. 41:14). Rashi explains that Yosef cut his hair and changed his clothes in honor of the royal. Rabbi Moshe Sofer (*Chasam Sofer al HaTorah* p. 206) asks, why did Rashi write that Yosef did so only in honor of the royal person with whom he was to meet? Why isn't his release from jail enough of a reason to cut his hair and change his clothes? Rabbi Sofer answers that in truth, Yosef realized that because Hashem was sending him his redemption through Pharaoh, and not via a totally divine and miraculous force, this portends the future exile of the Jewish People at the hands of Pharaoh. Yosef's release from jail actually marked in a certain way the beginning of the exile of the Jewish People in Egypt. Because of this, Yosef's release, *per se*, was not a good excuse for him to shave and change his clothing; rather, as Rashi explains, only because Yosef was meeting with a king did he feel it appropriate to shave and change his clothes.

And Pharaoh said to Yosef, 'I dreamt a dream, but it is without an explication. And I heard about you saying that you [can] hear a dream [in order] to interpret it (Gen. 41:15). R. Elazar in the name of R. Chanina (Megillah 15a) teaches that if one says something in the name of the person who said it, he brings redemption to the world. Rabbi Moshe Sofer (*Chasam Sofer al HaTorah* p. 206) writes that here, the Pharaoh did not mention from whom he heard about Yosef's dream-interpreting abilities. Because of this, the Pharaoh did not bring redemption (גאולה) to the world, he brought exile (גלות). It was once pointed out to me in the name of R. Benjamin Blech, that למד the word for learning, which is represented by the letter ל is present in the word גאולה. Without that letter, the word remains גאווה which means arrogance. Arrogance is when someone seeks all the credit for things. When one adds a ל to that, and learns from others, and quotes their influence on him, the word גאולה appears, and that arrogance of גאווה is thereby transformed.

And according to your mouth will my nation kiss (Gen. 41:40). Rabbi Aryeh Leib Tzintz explains that the word "will kiss" (ישק) appears twice in the Bible. Once here, and once in the verse: "Lips will kiss he who answered proven words" (Prov. 24:26). He explains, based on *Tosafos* (to *Gittin* 9a) that when somebody gives a sure answer, then all those around

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him “kiss” their lips together in silence, as they have nothing to say back to him.¹ Similarly, here Pharaoh said to Yosef that he will be entrusted with such authority that all the wisemen of Egypt will not be able to make any complaints about Yosef’s decisions, rather they will “kiss” their lips together in silence and accept whatever Yosef decides.

And he [Pharaoh] gave him Osnas, daughter of Poti-Phera, priest of Heliopolis as a wife... (Gen. 41:45). Rabbi Chaim Yosef David Azulai, the Chida, writes in *Dvash Le-Fi* (*Maareches Aleph*, 18) in the name of Rabbi Menachem Azariah of Fano that the name Osnas (אסנת = 511) in *gematria* equals that of the word “wisdom” (חכמה = 73) sevenfold (73 * 7 = 511). This alludes to the fact that when Yosef married Osnas, he merited to acquire all seven strands of wisdom. See also Rabbi Reuven Margoliois’ *Shemos Ve-Kinuyayhem*.

...before the years of the famine will arrive (Gen. 41:50). The Torah stresses that Yosef’s two sons were born before the arrival of the famine to teach that once the famine arrived, one could not expect him to sire children. This is because the Talmud says (*Taanis* 11b) that it is forbidden for couples to engage in marital relations during a time when people are suffering from a famine. However, the *Tosafos* ask: if so, then how could Yocheved have been born as Yaakov’s family crossed the border into Egypt, if they were in middle of a famine and her parents should have been forbidden from procreating? *Tosafos* answer that this prohibition does not extend to everybody, but only to supremely pious individuals like Yosef. Others answer that on the Mikvah Night it is permitted (see *Magen Avraham, Orach Chaim* 974). The *Tosafists* in their commentary to the Chumash (*Daas Zekanim*) also ask this question and answer in the name of Rabbi Yehuda HaChassid that the prohibition only applies to somebody who is a prophet, like Yosef, who knew for certain that there was going

¹ Rashi (there) explains that it means that whoever answers an established, proven answer *is fitting to be kissed*. Rabbi Yosef Chaim of Baghdad (*Ben Yehoyada* there) explains in the name of son Rabbi Yaakov that one cannot kiss the words he said because words are abstract and kissing only applies to something physical, and one cannot kiss the lips which uttered these words because it is disgusting to kiss somebody’s lips, for they are dirtied with spit. Rather, whoever offered such a wise answer remains *fitting to be kissed* but should not actually be kissed. Rabbi Yonah Teomim (*Kikayon de-Yonah* there) explains that *Tosafos* did not want to explain the verse like Rashi did because if it refers to regular kissing, then the word *lips* is extra, because one always kisses with one lips. Instead, they explained that it refers to the “kissing” (i.e. closing) of the lips together, not a regular act of kissing. The *Zera Yitzchok* (there) explains that because it says קשׁ” which is an outgoing verb, rather than קשׁ” a reflexive verb, *Tosafos* understood that it refers to the lips doing an act of kissing to each other. See also *Metzudat* (to Prov.) who has some precious and pleasant words written about this.

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to be a famine. However, Yocheved's parents did not know for certain that the famine was going to be long-lasting, so they were not prohibited from cohabiting for its duration. Alternatively, the Tosafists answer that at the root of this difference is a Halachic argument between Yosef and Levi. Both of them agreed that the prohibition of cohabiting during a famine only applies to somebody who has already fulfilled his commandment of procreation, but somebody who has yet to fulfill that commandment, is allowed to cohabit during a famine in an attempt to procreate. Accordingly, Yosef followed the opinion of Beis Shammai that the commandment of procreation requires one to sire two sons, so once he already had two sons, he was no longer allowed to cohabit to have more children during a famine. However, Levi understood that the commandment requires one to father a son and a daughter (like Beis Hillel).² Therefore, because Levi only had three sons before the onset of the famine, he was allowed to continue cohabiting with his wife in order to try to have a daughter to fulfill the commandment of procreation.

...for God has made me forget all my tribulations and everything [about] my father's house (Gen. 41:51). Rabbi Mordechai HaKohen of Tzfas (in *Sifsei Kohen*, end of *Parshas Miketz*, Gematria section) explains that the word "made me forget" (נשנתי = 410) alludes to the First Holy Temple which stood for 410 years. During that time, each man lived peacefully under his own vine and fig-tree, and they forgot all the sorrows and tribulations of their time in Egypt.

² The Ostrovitzer Gaon (*Meir Einei Chachamim, Parshas Behaloscha*) explains that Levi is associated with the tribe of Yehuda because they share a mother (Leah), so Levi followed the opinion of Beis Hillel, as Hillel represented the continuation of the Kingship of Yehudah. Yosef, on the other hand, was a descendant of Rachel, so he followed the opinion of Beis Shammai. Nonetheless, Moshe Rabbeinu himself—despite being a descendant of Levi—followed the opinion of Beis Shammai, as Moshe Rabbeinu abstained from his wife after the birth of his two sons Gershom and Eliezer because he understood that he had already fulfilled his commandment of procreation. And, we must note, Moshe Rabbeinu himself was only born because of the opinion of Beis Shammai: After his father Amram had already fathered Miriam and Aharon, he separated from Yocheved. However, Miriam was able to convince Amram to remarry Yocheved by arguing that he had not yet fulfilled the commandment of procreation because he only had one son and one daughter (which is only enough according to Beis Hillel), but needs to sire two sons (in order to fulfill the commandment according to Beis Shammai). This argument convinced Amram to remarry Yocheved and from that union, Moshe was born. This shows that Moshe was already tied to the opinion of Beis Shammai at his very essence. See also *Meshech Chachmah* to the verse **וַיִּשְׁכַּח מֹשֶׁה אֶת אֵל הָעֶרְפֵּל**, and my extensive treatment of this subject in *Melo Chaf Nochas*.

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...for God has made me forget all my tribulations and everything [about] my father's house (Gen. 41:51). Why does Yosef seem to take pride in his “forgetting” about his father's household, such that he names his firstborn son after his amnesia? See *Techelies Mordechai* written by the Maharsham, Rabbi Sholom Mordechai HaKohen of Brezhen. R. Kalonymous Kalman Epstein answers in *Meor VaShemesh* that when Yosef came with the intentions of sinning with Potiphar's wife, he was dissuaded from doing the deed by a vision in which he saw the image of his father. However, once Yosef took that opportunity to abstain from sin, he now conquered his *yetzer harah* in such a way that in the future, he would no longer need the image of his father to dissuade him from sin—he would be able to control himself on his own. Because of this, Yosef no longer needed to keep in his mind an image of his father in order to defeat his *yetzer harah*; now he could allow himself to “forget” about his father, and rely on his own faculties. Alternatively, we can explain that when we spoke of Yosef “forgetting” about his father's house, this does not mean that he literally “forgot” about it, but that he was able to move beyond his situation in which he was forcibly estranged from his family. Otherwise, Yosef would be moping around in a state of depression, continuously lamenting his sad situation. Had Yosef become a sad broken man filled with bitterness of the loss of his loving family and the injustice heaped upon him, we'd all understand and sympathize with him. Instead, Hashem gave him the strength to “forget” his family and focus on what he had instead of on what he didn't have. We may add to this that Yosef is called a pleasant person (נעים), because, as Rashi (to Gen. 43:30) explains, Binyamin named his ten sons after ten different character traits associated with Yosef. One of his sons was named Naaman (נעמן), which Rashi explains refers to the fact that Yosef was an especially “pleasant” person. In the Scroll of Ruth, we meet a character named Naomi (נעמי) whose life took several unfortunate turns, and she told people, “Do not call me Naomi, rather call me Mara (מראמר) for Hashem has very embittered my [life] (Ruth 1:20).” Ralbag (there) explains that bitter is the opposite of נעים/pleasant. From this we see that Yosef, who was described as pleasant, was by definition not a bitter person and did not hold a grudge against life and feel like a victim. Yosef was able to overcome his situation and “forgot” about whatever he was missing and continued onward with life.

And the name of the second one he called Ephraim, 'because God has allowed me to be productive in the land of my destitute' (Gen. 41:52). Rabbeinu Bechaya (to Gen. 18:27) writes that we find that the term Ephraim can be used to describe the entire Jewish People, as Jeremiah says, “Is Ephraim my beloved son?” (Jer. 31). This is because the name Ephraim (אפרים) could be understood as the plural of “ash” (אפר), an allusion to the ash of

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Avraham (who belittle himself by saying “I am but ash and dirt”) and the ash of Yitzchak (who was “burnt” at the *Akeidah*). These two ashes, of course, serve as the catalyst for Jewish growth, as the Jewish People can only continue to multiply in exile because of the merits of Avraham and Yitzchak.

And Yaakov saw that there is grain in Egypt. Behold! I hear that there is grain in Egypt, descend to there and sustain for us, and we will live and we will not die (Gen. 42:1–2). Rabbi Moshe Sofer (*Chasam Sofer al HaTorah* p. 210) notes that the word for “grain” used here is *shever* (שבר) which also means “broken”. He notes that this alludes to the fact that “breaking” the *gematria* of the word Egypt (מצרים = 380) into two halves ($380 / 2 = 190$) yields the *gematria* of the word “end” (קץ = 190). This hints to the notion that Hashem “broke with” the original plan which called for the Jews to be exiled in Egypt for 400, by subtracting 190 years from that sentence such that the Jews only remained in Egypt for 210 years ($400 - 190 = 210$). (Gen. 42:2). In the commentary *Pi HaMidaber* to the Haggadah Shel Pesach by Rabbi Yosef Gigi (first printed in 1854 in Livorno by the author’s son, and reprinted in Monsey in 2009, pg. 16) cites the Chida’s commentary *Simchas HaRegel (Karpas)* to the Haggadah Shel Pesach, in which he explains that Hashem skipped over the time of the end of the exile because the work that the enslaved Jews performed was especially strenuous, back-breaking work. This is alluded to in the word *karpas*³ (ס' רבוא שעבדו עבודת = כרפס = פרוך). Perhaps Yaakov meant to hint to this when he said: “there is grain in Egypt, descend to there and sustain for us, and we will live and we will not die” the word for “grain” and for “sustain” is שבר, which also means “breaking” i.e. through back-breaking work, they will “break” the number of years they will have to spend in exile.

He [Yosef] was the provider for the whole nation of the land (Gen. 42:6). The Talmud (*Brachos* 33a) relates: There was once a place where there was an *Arod* (a dangerous reptile with some similarities to a snake and other similarities to a frog) which was hurting people. They went and told Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa about it. Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa asked them

³ This idea found in the Abudraham. See also Maharal Tzintz’s commentary *Birkas HaShir* to the Haggada Shel Pesach. Rabbi Avraham Schorr (in *HaLekach VaHaLibuv* to Haggada Shel Pesach) writes in the name of anonymous *seforim* that *karpas* (כרפס = 360) in *gematria* equals *shas* (שש = 360), the common acronym used to refer to the Six Orders of the Mishnah (שישה סדרי משנה). The study of Torah can also be like back-breaking work if one toils in Torah Study with much effort. Indeed, just as the Mishnah in *Avos* says that Torah study is achieved by eschewing worldly pleasures and “eating bread with salt, and drinking measured water”, so is the *karpas* accompanied with water and salt.

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to show him its burrow, and Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa put his heel on top of the burrow. The *Arod* came out of its hole, and bit Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa, but then the *Arod* died. Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa took the *Arod* on his shoulder and carried it to the *Beis Midrash* where he announced “see, my children, the *Arod* does not kill, rather sins kill”. From then on, people used to say, “Woe to the person who encounters an *Arod*, and woe to the *Arod* who encounters Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa”. The Talmud also says about Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa that Hashem says: “The entire world is sustained because of Chanina, My son” (*Brachos* 17b). Rabbi Yaakov Yosef of Polonoye writes (*Toldos Yaakov Yosef, Parshas Tzav*) that the entire world is sustained “because of Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa mens that it is sustained *through* Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa, because he was the conduit for Hashem’s abundant influx to the world. Just as this is true about physical sustenance, so is the *tzadik* a pipeline for Hashem’s abundant influx of wisdom to the world.⁴ Rabbi Yosef Engel (*Shev Dinechamta* p. 55b) adds that this is the level of Yosef HaTzadik, for he was the provider for the entire nation. He also explains that Yosef parallels Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa in that the snakes and scorpions in the pit (see *Shabbos* 22a) did not affect him, just as the *Arod* could not hurt Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa.

...by the life of Pharaoh... (Gen. 42:15). The Talmud Yerushalmi (*Brachos* 1:5) maintains that all of the Ten Commandments are alluded to in the paragraphs of *Kriyas Shema*. The Talmud explains that the prohibition of taking G-d’s name in vain is alluded to in the opening command, “And you shall love Hashem...”, for if one loves the king, one does not swear falsely in his name. Based on this, Rabbi Tzvi Elimelech Shapiro (author of *Bnei Yisaschar*) writes in *Maggid Taalumab* (to the Talmud Yerushalmi) that here Yosef swore falsely “by the life of Pharaoh” because he hated Pharaoh.

And Reuven said to his father saying, ‘my two sons shall die if I do not bring him [Binyamin] to you. Please give him through my [insurance] and I will return him to you’ (Gen. 42:37). Rabbi Zvi Hirsch Chajes asked Rabbi Moshe Sofer (*Shaalos Utsbuvas Chasam Sofer, Orach Chaim* vol. 1 208) how could Reuven just offer up the life of his two sons like that? Rabbi Moshe Sofer answered that Reuven did not literally mean to offer up the life of his two sons as insurance for Binyamin’s well-being, rather Reuven offered to sacrifice something else. The Talmud (*Bava Basra* 118b) expounds on the verse “And Calev, son of Yefuneh, and Yehoshua, son of Nun, [alone] lived from amongst the men [i.e. the original

⁴ See *Pardes Rimonim* (*Shaar* #32, Ch. 1) who explains that the *tzadik* is God’s pipeline in influencing the world. See also what Rabbi Yosef Engel wrote about this in *Otzaros Yosef* (*Maamar Levanah* 23).

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spies] to mean that they alone “survived” in that they received the lost portions in the Holy Land that the dead spies were supposed to have received. From here, we see that “living” sometimes does not actually refer to literal life versus death, but to the inheritance of land in *Eretz Yisroel*. Accordingly, “death” in this case does not actually refer to real death, but to the forfeiture of land in *Eretz Yisroel*. Reuven mistakenly understood that he was the rightful firstborn of Yaakov’s children, so he deserved that his children inherit a double portion in *Eretz Yisroel*. When trying to convince Yaakov to send Binyamin to Egypt, Reuven offered to use his double portion as collateral to insure Binyamin’s safety. Reuven was mistaken because Yaakov already decided that the firstborn privileges should be transferred from Reuven to Yosef. The Chasam Sofer adds this to this answer what Yaakov’s response was to this proposal: The Midrash (*Bereshis Rabbah* 91:12) relates that when Reuven made his offer to Yaakov, Yaakov rhetorically asked, “He [Reuven] is a stupid firstborn! They are his [i.e. Reuven’s] sons, and they are not my sons [meaning “are they not my sons as well? I gain nothing from the death of Reuven’s two sons because they are also my grandsons, and thus what sort of promise is that?”] The Chasam Sofer proposes reading Yaakov’s literally, and not rhetorically: “They [Reuven’s sons] are his [i.e. Reuven’s] sons [and as such only receive one portion of the inheritance which comes to them from Reuven’s allotment], and they are not my sons [which would mean that each son would receive his own portion like Yaakov’s other sons, thus allowing Reuven’s descendants altogether to receive two portions instead of one, which they would have received had Reuven been considered the firstborn, and indeed Menashe and Efraim, Yosef’s sons were, when Yaakov declared “Efraim and Menashe, like Reuven and Shimon will be to me”].” With this, The Chasam Sofer explains that Yaakov’s opening line “*bechor shoteh*” does not mean “stupid firstborn” but “lacking firstborn”, just as the word *shoteh* elsewhere refers to a myrtle branch which lacks in leaves to compensate for its berries (see *Sukkah* 12a). This means that Reuven was a “firstborn” because technically he was born first, but is “lacking” in that he did not have the full status of a firstborn (as that right went to Yosef).

Chalilah for your servant from doing such a thing (Gen. 44:7). What does *chalilah* mean? Rashi explains that *chalilah* is derived from the word *chullin* (חולין, “profane”) and explains that it would be a disgrace for us to do such a thing. However, Rashi also cited Targum Onkelos who translates *chalilah* as *chas*, and notes that a similar expression appear in the Talmud: *chas v’shalom*. Rabbi Eliyahu Mizrachi explains that Rashi means that according to Targum, the word *chalilah* is not an expression of profanity, but rather means *chus* (“mercy”), an expression of clemency. According to this understanding, *chalilah* means “may God have

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mercy on you” that such a thing should not be done. This is also the meaning of the phrase *chas v'shalom* (loosely translated as “G-d forbid”) which is a request that G-d have mercy on us and prevent such-and-such from happening.