

A collection of fascinating material on the weekly parsha!

Rabbi Elchanan Shoff

## PARSHAS VAYESHEV

***And Yaakov settled in the land where his father dwelled (Gen. 37:1).*** Rashi explains that Yaakov wished to settle in tranquility, but then the matter of Joseph sprung up upon him. The Gemara (*Sanhedrin* 106a) records: R. Yochanan said that anytime the Torah says *vayeihev* (וישב), it is an expression of suffering. He adduces this several from passages including the one at hand that use the word *vayeshev* as a prelude to an unfortunate episode. The *Toras Chaim* explains that the word *vayeshev* is an abbreviation of “woe to the one who settles” (וישב). He explains that the underlying reason for this is that a person is supposed to view his place in This World as temporary and recognize that his main purpose of existence will be realized in the World to Come. For this reason, whenever a person decides to view This World as his permanent domicile, disaster ensues, as Hashem tries to remind him that one day he will eventually leave This World and enter the World to Come.

***These are the offspring of Yaakov: Yosef (Gen. 37:2).*** The *Bnei Yissaschar* (in *Agra DiKallab, Parshas Massei*) explains the word *emes* (אמת) represents a congruency between the source and the offspring. For example, if somebody relates a story and that story matches what actually happened, then there is congruency between the source (i.e., what really happened) and the offspring (i.e. the retelling of what happened). This is called *emes*. Based on this, he explains that because Yaakov Aveinu is associated with the character trait of *emes*, as the prophet Michah says (Micah 7:20), we can understand that his offspring would also be associated with *emes*. Indeed, the offspring of *emes* (Yaakov) is Yosef because, if one spells out all the letters in the word *emes* (א+מ+ת+ ע+מ+א = 597), and subtracts the letters of *emes* themselves (אמת = 441), one is left with the number 156 representing the hidden value of the letters that are present in *emes* behind the scenes, which are the same *gematria* as *Yosef* (י+ס+פ = 156).

***And Israel loved Yosef from amongst all his children, because he was a ben zekunim for him (Gen. 37:3).*** What is a *ben zekunim*? Targum Onkeles understands that *zekunim* is an expression of wisdom (like a *zaken* in Tanach refers to a wiseman), so the Torah means that Yosef was a smart child. R. Elazar Rokeach of Worms (in his commentary to the Torah, pg. 176, cited by the Chida in *Pnei Dovid to Vayeshev*, 28) explains that the word *zekunim* (זקנים) is written without the vowel *vav* (זקונים), in order to allude to the phrase “seven branches” (ז' קנים). This hints to the seven-branched Menorah of the Holy Temple which the righteous people are destined to resemble in that seven groups of righteous men will give off light just as the Menorah does. The Chida also writes that Yaakov loved Yosef so much

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because he taught Yosef the Seven Books of the Torah (the Talmud tells us that though we normally count 5 books of the Torah, they can also be broken into 7, i.e. Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers until **ויהי בנסוע**, the Parshah of **ויהי בנסוע**, Numbers after **ויהי בנסוע**, and Deuteronomy), which are alluded to in the seven branches of the Menorah. Moreover, the seven branches of the Menorah allude to the seven branches of wisdom. Just as all the branches of the Menorah subservient to the *Ner Maaravi* (Western Candle) for all the candles of the menorah would lean toward it, so are all sorts of science/wisdom subservient to the wisdom of the Torah. Yosef was called a *ben zekunim* because he mastered all seven forms of wisdom. Moreover, the Menorah is associated with Yosef because Yosef himself is very much tied to the idea of Chanukah,<sup>1</sup> as the *gematria* of *Yosef* (יֹסֵף = 156) equals that of “The Greek King” (מֶלֶךְ יוֹן = 156) and “Antiochus” (אַנְטִיּוֹכֻס = 156).

**And behold the sun and the moon... (Gen. 37:8).** *Midrash HaGadol* explains that the sun is an allusion to Yaakov, because when Yaakov arrived at Beth-El, the Torah says “for the sun has come” (Gen. 28:11). The *Midrash Sechel Tov* explains that the “moon” refers to Bilhah. He explains that the moon (יָרֵחַ) alludes to women because there are three types of months (יָרֵחַ) which parallel three types of women: <sup>1</sup> Some months are full thirty-day months, just as some women are “full-stomached” (i.e. pregnant). <sup>2</sup> Other months are regular twenty-nine day months, just as some woman are “regular-stomached” (i.e. when they are not pregnant). <sup>3</sup> Some months are “pushed off” (i.e. the beginning of the Halachic month is delayed and start after the beginning of the astronomical month), just as some women are “pushed-off” from intimacy with their husbands (i.e. when she is menstruating or counting her seven clean days).

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<sup>1</sup> In light of the connection between Yosef and the Menorah, we can now better understand an otherwise enigmatic *Baal HaTurim*. The *Baal HaTurim* writes that Yosef was called a *ben zekunim* because *zekunim* (זְקֻנִים) is an acronym for five of the Orders of the Mishnah (זרעים קדשים נשים ישועות/נזיקין מועד). Yosef is called a *ben zekunim* because of his mastery over these parts of the Mishnah. The question is that there are of course Six Orders of the Mishnah, not five; which means that Yosef didn't know the Order of Taharos (טהרות), which details the laws concerning ritual purity and impurity. However, in light of the connection between Yosef and it's interesting to point out that just as the Menorah is considered a Temple service which is for the general public and therefore suspend the laws of ritual impurity if most of the Jewish People are impure, so did Yosef somehow transcend the laws of ritual purity and impurity.

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**And he [Yaakov] said to him [Yosef], ‘go now and see the welfare of your brothers and the welfare of the livestock, and return to me word [of their welfare]’ (Gen. 37:14).** The *Sifsei Tzadik* explains that there are two components which make up every person. The first is the earth component, of which his physical body is comprised. The second is the *neshamah*—the soul, which is the Divine element from Above. On Shabbos, a person receives an extra *neshamah*, as is alluded to in the name Yosef (יוסף) which is related to the word for “addition”. This passuk is hinting to Hashem speaking to the additional soul of each person when sending it to that person before the shabbos. The prophet Ovadiah compares the House of Yosef to a flame (להבה), and indeed sometimes the additional *neshamah* which a person gets on Shabbos can serve as a catalyst for enflaming his enthusiasm (התלהבות). About such a situation, Yaakov Aveinu told Yosef—the extra *neshamah*—“Go now and see the welfare of your brother [i.e. the regular *neshamah* that a person has during the rest of the week] and the welfare of the livestock [i.e. the animalistic component of one’s existence, which is his physical body]”. This means that on Shabbos, one should take advantage of his extra *neshamah* to better himself overall. The *Zohar* says that on *Motzei Shabbos*, when the extra *neshamah* returns to its place, they ask the extra *neshamah*, “What *Chiddushei Torah* did you hear from this person?”. For this reason, Yaakov says to the extra *neshamah*, “and return to me word (דבר)”, because the extra *neshamah* is expected to bring with it words of Torah.

**And they sold Yosef to the Ishmaelites for twenty silver [pieces] (Gen. 37:28).** What did they do with the money that gained from selling Yosef? Targum Yonasan (there) explains that they bought shoes with that money. Indeed, *Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer* (ch. 37) relates that they sold Yosef to the Ishmaelites for twenty silver pieces, and each brother received two silver pieces which they used to buy shoes for their feet. This is alluded to in the prophecy of Amos who criticized the Kingdom of Israel “for selling a righteous man for silver, and a destitute for shoes”. What is the significance of Yosef’s brothers selling him in order to buy shoes? Rabbi Avraham Aveili (author of *Magen Avraham to Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim*) writes in his commentary *Zayis Raanan* (to *Yalkut Shimon*) that a person who goes about without shoes resembles somebody who has been excommunicated (as such a person is required to remove his shoes). The idea behind this is that when Adam ate from the Tree of Knowledge, one of the ramifications of his sin was that Hashem cursed the ground. A regular person who is not in excommunication must separate himself from the accursed ground by wearing shoes that are a barrier between his feet and the ground. However, a

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person who is excommunicated and is therefore also cursed, must not wear shoes in order to show that he is like the ground—also cursed.<sup>2</sup> By selling Yosef in order to buy shoes, Yosef's brothers were registering their dissatisfaction with him by arguing that it is Yosef's fault that they must wear shoes because Yosef himself resembles Adam (see *Bava Metziah* 84a that Yaakov looked like Adam, and Rashi earlier says that Yosef looked like Yaakov). By buying shoes with the money from selling Yosef, they blamed Yosef for the situation in which men have to wear shoes to separate themselves from the ground which Yosef/Adam caused to be cursed. My Rebbi, R. Aharon Kaufman (Rosh Yeshiva of Ateres Shmuel in Waterbury), once suggested to me a different understanding. All of creation is made up of four types of

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<sup>2</sup> The *Bnei Yisaschar* (*Agra diPirka* 304) quotes Rabbi Moshe Chagiz (*Mishnas Chachamim*) as explaining that for this reason, when one enters a holy place (e.g. the Holy Temple), he must remove his shoes because that place is not included in the general curse which was levied upon the ground. The *Bnei Yisaschar* also writes that in light of this idea, we can now better understand why Chazal tell us: "A person should [even] sell everything he has [in order] to buy shoes for his feet" (*Shabbos* 129a). This because shoes create a separation between a person who is not cursed and the ground which is cursed. By creating that separation, man can now enter the realm of the blessed. As long as he is still connected to that which is cursed, he cannot receive a blessing. For this reason, the *bracha* recited over wearing shoes is **שעשה לי כל צרכי** (that He created for me all my needs), shoes are the impetus to allow one to receive Hashem's blessings. Based on this, he explains that wearing shoes is forbidden on Yom Kippur because Yom Kippur is on a temporal level what the Holy Temple is on a spatial level. Meaning, just as one who enters the Holy Temple must remove his shoes because that place is outside of the general curse pronounced against the ground, so must one who enters the time of Yom Kippur remove his shoes because that blessed day is outside of the general curse. He also explains that one must not wear shoes on Tisha B'Av for a different reason: The day of Tisha B'Av alludes to the day that the Messiah will be born, and the Messiah will be the one to rectify the sins of Adam and overturn to the curse against the ground and make it blessed, so we do not wear shoes on Tisha B'Av to lament the fact that this Messianic transformation for which we yearn has not yet transpired. Nonetheless, Rabbi Chaim Palagi (*Ruach Chaim* to *Orach Chaim* 554:2) writes that the custom amongst the Sephardic Jews is not to go about barefoot on Tisha B'Av, rather they have something between their feet and the ground (not leather shoes, but something else). This is because the Kabbalists wrote that since the ground is cursed, then the spiritual pollution will infect anybody who treads directly on the ground barefoot. For this reason, the Halacha is that one who touches his shoes must wash *netilas yadaim*, because the ground is cursed and therefore spiritually impure. Nonetheless, he adds that none of this applies in the Holy Land (the Land of Israel) which is not cursed, it only applies outside of the Holy Land.

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creatures: "inanimate objects" (like rocks and other inanimate objects), "growing creatures" (like plants and flora), "living creatures" (like animals and other forms of fauna), and "speaking creatures" (i.e. humans). The Vilna Gaon (cited in *Torah LaDaas* to Gen. 9:2) explains that when man wishes to show his sovereignty over all of creation, he wears leather under his feet. By putting one's foot on top of leather, one shows that he has subdued the "living creatures", and certainly rules over all the lower forms of creation. Based upon this idea, Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Auerbach explained that the Torah forbids us from wearing leather shoes on Yom Kippur and during times of mourning because those are not times for man to assert his dominance, but are times when a person should be humbled. Yosef's dreams showed that he would rule over his brothers, yet in practice, he was sent to help them, not vice versa. For this reason, when his brothers sold him, they wished to convey the lesson that they are the dominant ones, not him, so they wore shoes in order to illustrate that point.

***A wild animal ate him (Gen. 37:34).*** Rashi explains that a spark of divine inspiration can be found in Yaakov's words, because ultimately the wife of Potiphar would start up with Yosef. Why did Hashem not reveal to Yaakov directly that Yosef was still alive? *Midrash Tanchuma* explains that this was because Yosef's brothers made a pact that a curse shall befall anybody who reveals Yosef's true whereabouts, and they included Hashem in this pact. However, Yitzchak (who was still alive at this time) was nonetheless made aware of the reality of Yosef's situation through divine revelation, but he did not tell Yaakov what happened because he reasoned that if Hashem did not want to tell Yaakov, then neither should he. *Beer BaSadeh* explains that Yosef himself never sent a letter to Yaakov to tell him where he was because he, like Yitzchak, reasoned that if Hashem wanted Yaakov to know, He would have already revealed to him this information. Another possibility of why Yosef never sent word to his father is that Yosef realized that it would likely destroy his father's family should he reveal to him what his brothers had done to him, causing his father even more pain.

***And Yaakov tore his clothes, and he put sackcloth on his thigh, and he mourned over his son many days (Gen. 37:34).*** Rashi explains that Yaakov mourned over Yosef for twenty-two years—all the way until he ended up going to Egypt. The commentators ask: The Midrash (*Beresheet Rabbah* 84:19) explains that the reason why Yaakov refused to be consoled was because one cannot truly accept consolation of somebody alive, consolation

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only works for the deceased. When a mourner receives consolations for his dearly departed, he only does so for twelve months, after which Hashem decreed that the dead are in some measure forgotten by the heart, and the pain lessens a bit. If this is true, then why did Yaakov not realize that Yosef was actually alive because he kept receiving consolations for past a year beyond Yosef's disappearance, yet he was unable to be consoled? Rabbi Yeshaya Horowitz (in *Shnei Luchoš HaBris, Torah Shebichsav, Tzon Yosef* p. 159) and others ask this question. The gloss to the *Shnei Luchoš HaBris* there answers in the name of Rabbi Moshe Isserles, that the entire first year that Yosef was gone, Yaakov was convinced that Yosef died and saw his inability to be consoled as indicative of the fact that he was within twelve months of Yosef's passing. When the first year passed, he realized retroactively that Yosef must not have died then, because otherwise after twelve months have elapsed, he should have been consoled (because of the decree that people forget (at least marginally) about the deceased after 12 months). But, at the point, he reasoned that because Yosef was gone for so long and did not return, *now* he must have died and the twelve months begin from *now*. At the end of the next year, he realized retroactively that Yosef must not have died then, because otherwise after twelve months have elapsed, he should have been consoled. But, at the point, he reasoned that because Yosef was gone for so long and did not return, *now* he must have died and the twelve months begin from *now*... until twenty-two years when he found out that Yosef was really alive. Moreover, he answers that Yaakov understood that the reason why a deceased relative is remembered for twelve months after his passing, but is forgotten about thereafter is because during those twelve months, the deceased's soul regularly travels between This World and the Next World during that period, so whenever the soul is in This World, it is not forgotten about. However, after the twelve month period, the soul stays only in the Next World, such that those living in This World are completely disconnected from that soul and they forget about it. Nonetheless, Yaakov reasoned that this only applies to somebody who did not die childless, as such a person can pass on to the Next World without any trouble. However, the soul of a person who died childless, like Yaakov presumed was the case concerning Yosef, does not pass seamlessly to the Next World. Rather, just as the souls of Nadav and Avihu who died without ever marrying were doomed to float around freely until they were reincarnated and fixed by Pinchas, all souls of people who die without children must float around This World until they rectify their flaws. Accordingly, Yaakov reasoned that really Yosef was dead but that he could not be consoled over Yosef's death because his soul was still floating around to achieve its rectification.

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*It was at that time that Yehudah descended from amongst his brothers, and he pitched [his tent faraway] until an Adulamite man, and his name was Chirah (Gen. 38:1–2).* The Midrash (*Beresbis Rabbah* 85:4) explains that Chirah is the same person as Chiram, king of Tyre who was a friend of King David (see II Sam. 5:11–13). When it says that Chiram liked King David, this is because he originally liked King David’s ancestor Yehudah. According to this opinion, the Midrash notes, it turns out that Chirah/Chiram lived close to 1,200 years! R. Mendel Kasher (*Torah Shleimah* to Gen. 38:2 17) cites *Meseches Derech Eretz Zuta* (ch. 1, in the Higer edition, p. 69a) which says that Chirah (not Chiram!) king of Tyre was one of seven people who entered the Garden of Eden alive. Nonetheless, the *Hadar Zekanim* (written by the Tosafists) writes that Chiram was from the same family as Chirah, but was not necessarily the same person. Perhaps when the aforementioned Midrash said that Chirah lived 1,200 years, this does not literally mean that he lived for so long, because Chiram was from his family, but not actually him. Rather, the Midrash means that Chirah lived for so long in the spirit of the Talmud (*Bava Basra* 116a) which says that one who leaves over children who are like him is considered not to have died. Even though he physically died, Chirah’s descendants carried on his friendship with Yehudah and the Tribe of Yehudah (from which King David descends), so Chirah is considered to have not died). Another parallel between Chirah/Chiram and Yehudah/David is that just as Chirah helped Yehudah establish his first household by helping him marry his first wife Bas-Shua,<sup>3</sup> so did Chiram help King David and King Solomon build the first Holy Temple in Jerusalem.

*And she said ‘recognize now, to whom these signet and tassels...’ (Gen. 38:25).* The “tassels” mentioned here refer to the “tassels” of one’s *tzitzis*, but why does Tamar make a point of mentioning Yehudah’s *tzitzis*? The Talmud (*Menachos* 44a) tells the story of a man

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<sup>3</sup> Bas-Shua (בת-שווע) might be the name of Yehudah’s first. An equally acceptable explanation is that her name is not mentioned at all, but she is described as the “daughter of [some guy named] Shua” (בת שווע). Rabbi Eliyahu HaKohen of Izmir (in *Midrash Talpiyot* s.v. “יהודה”) writes in the name of Rabbi Shmuel Kalonymous that really Shua (שווע) is a cryptonym for Eisav (עשו), whose name is spelled with the same letters. According to this, Yehudah’s first father-in-law was none other than his uncle Eisav, but because Eisav was so wicked, the Torah obscured his name by scrambling the letters such that it reads Shua instead. Moreover, Yehudah himself represents the concept of repentance (the root of his name is *vidui*, confession), so his father-in-law’s name is given as שווע (prayer)—an essential part of repentance.

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who was very careful in the commandment of *tzitzis*. One day, this man decided to travel to a faraway destination in order to hire the services of a certain expensive prostitute. After exerting much effort to consummate his desires, this man's *tzitzis* hit him in the face, and this dissuaded him from finishing the sinful deed. This story teaches us that *tzitzis* have the powers to curb one's illicit sexual desires. Indeed, the song *Yom LaYabashah* which customarily sung at a bris mentions the commandment of *tzitzis* alongside the commandment of circumcision because both commandments have the ability to save one from sexual misdeeds. With this in mind, R. Meir Eisenstadt in *Kasnos Or (Parshas Beshalach)* explains that Tamar stressed the fact that when Yehudah resolved to fornicate with her, he was wearing "tassels" (i.e. *tzitzis*)—which he later gave to her as a collateral pending final payment for her "services—in order to tell Yehudah that he has no reason to be embarrassed even if he were to admit having impregnated her. The Midrash says that when Yehudah first walked past Tamar, he initially ignored her and walked right past her, but because it was part of Hashem's Divine master-plan that Yehudah should fornicate with her, Hashem sent the Angel of Desire to arouse Yehudah's desires and compel him to be with her. This means that Yehudah's sexual urge which ultimately drove him to fornicating with Tamar was not the result of a natural desire, but was the result of specific Divine intervention to bring that about. By mentioning Yehudah's "tassels", Tamar stressed this point, for if Yehudah were wearing *tzitzis*, he could be assumed to have special protection from succumbing to natural sexual desires. The fact that Yehudah submitted to an urge to fornicate with Tamar despite wearing *tzitzis* shows that really he was not at fault, but rather succumbed to an unnatural desire which Hashem put in him in order to bring about the outcome He wanted. Accordingly, Tamar mentioned the *tzitzis* in order to show that even if Yehudah would admit to having fornicated with her himself, he was not to blame, for it was Divine Intervention which brought that about.

**And he refused (Gen. 39:8).** The word "and he refused" is written with the cantillation note *shalsbeles*. R. Avraham HaKohen of Tunisia (in *Avraham Yagel*, p. 399) explains that this alludes to idea found in Chazal that originally Yaakov Aveinu was destined to be brought down to Egypt as a prisoner in iron chains (*shalsbeloas*, plural of *shalsbeles*), but because Yosef refused to sin enticed to do so in Egypt, Yaakov Aveinu merited to be brought down to Egypt with great honor and fanfare. For this reason, Yosef's refusal is accentuated with the cantillation note *shalsbeles* (שלשלת) which literally means "chain".

**And she grabbed him by his clothing (Gen. 39:12).** Rabbi Nosson Nota Shapiro reveals (*Megaleh Amukos Tinyana, Shemos, Derush 4:5*) that when it says that the wife of Potiphar

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grabbed Yosef “by his clothing” this does not literally mean that she grabbed the clothing on his person. Rather, it means that Yosef had completely escaped, but that he was replaced by a demon in his likeness. It was this demon that Potiphar’s wife grabbed (which is called Yosef’s clothing because just as a clothing is a person’s outer shell, so does a demon who likes like somebody only resemble that person on the surface, but not on the inside). He further explains that two other people were replaced with demons when taken in for sinning: Sarah, when she was abducted by Pharaoh, and Esther, when she was abducted by Achashverosh. He says that the word “man” (איש) is an acronym for these three people (אסתר יוסף שרה). R. Mordechai HaKohen of Tzfas (*Sifsei Kohen*) similarly writes that in lieu of sleeping with Potiphar’s wife, Yosef sent a demon to sleep with her (just like Sarah did to Pharaoh, and Esther, to Achashverosh). However, Potiphar’s wife was herself a witch and she caught on to Yosef’s ruse. She said, “You are betraying me (בוגד) in that you are bringing me a demon. You think that I do not know this? I do not want the ‘clothing’ (בגד) that you made for me [i.e. the demon in his likeness], rather I want you!” The same is cited by *Yalkut Reuveni*.

***And he [Yosef] came to the house to do his duty, and there was no man from the household there in the house (Gen. 39:19).*** The Chida in *Chomas Onach* (to Ecc. 4:14) writes that the phrase “there was no man” (ואין איש) serves as an acronym for the phrase “and the likeness of his father Yaakov appeared to Yosef there” (ודמות אביו יעקב נראה אל יוסף שם). As Rashi explains, this image of his father is eventually what dissuaded Yosef from sinning. The Tosafos Shantz (to *Sotah* 36b)<sup>4</sup> cites a Midrash that relates that when Yosef came into the house to do the deed, he found himself emasculated as though his reproductive organ was removed or ambiguous. This is what it means “and there was no man”; i.e. Yosef lost his “manliness”.

***And the master of Yosef took him, and put him in the jail—the place where the king’s prisoners are imprisoned—and he was there in the jail (Gen. 39:20).*** Rabbi Yosef Chaim of Baghdad (author of *Ben Ish Chai*) explains in his *Aderet Eliyahu* that this verse alludes to the soul’s descent into This World. “And the master of Yosef took him” refers to the Master of the Universe taking a soul, “and put him in the jail” refers to the placing of that soul in This World, which is falls into the dominion of the Evil Inclination. The Evil

<sup>4</sup> What is called *Tosafos Shantz* on *Sotah* is really *Tosafos Evreux*, see Mossad HaRav Kook ed. (Jerusalem 2008).

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Inclination, of course, is the Hashem's servant who serves to insure that His subjects worship Him with both their hearts (as our sages say that one must love Hashem with one's Hashem with one's *yetzer tov* and one's *yetzer harah*). In doing so, Hashem essentially takes a soul and imprisons it in This World—"the place where the king's prisoners are imprisoned" i.e., the place which is filled with sparks of holiness that are trapped in their place and waiting to be revealed, that is, This World.

***And the Official Baker saw the he [Yosef] interpreted [his dream] well (Gen. 40:16).*** *Paneach Raza* explains that because Yosef interpreted the dream in a way that its effects would imminently occur (i.e. they were only three days away from its fruition), Pharaoh's Baker concluded that Yosef was telling the truth. This is because if Yosef was lying, he would have said that the realization of the dream would come at the latest possible time, in order to avoid being caught. As the Rabbinic expression goes, "הרוצה לשקר ירחיק עדותו" "he who wishes to deceive speaks of far off things."

***Pharaoh's birthday (Gen. 40:20).*** Rabbi Yonasan Shteif (*Amaros Vayeishev*, 106) writes that we never find throughout the Jewish people that there is a notion of celebrating birthdays, rather the only place we find such a thing is here concerning Pharaoh. Nonetheless, we do find that when the amora Rav Yosef reached the age of sixty, he made a festival for the rabbis to show that he outlived the age by which *kares* (spiritual excision) is applied (See *Moed Katan* 28a). He also writes that he heard that on his birthday, Rabbi Moshe Sofer (the *Chasam Sofer*) would lie down in a lifeless position and confess his sins, and also make a *siyum* on a Talmudic tractate. Either way, Rabbi Shteif concludes that a birthday is a time for one to give special thanks to Hashem for allowing him to live another year and to pray for Hashem to add more days and years to his lifespan so that he may continue studying Torah and serving Hashem. The Talmud (*Brachos* 28a) famously says that when Rabbi Elazar ben Azariah was appointed the *nasi* (prince) of the Jewish People, he was eighteen years old *on that day*. Rabbi Yosef Chaim of Baghdad (author of the *Ben Ish Chai*) observes in *Ben Yehoyada* (there) that Rabbi Elazar ben Azariah's appointment came *on his actual birthday* when he turned eighteen. Because it was his birthday and his *mazal* is extra strong on that day, Hashem performed a miracle on Rabbi Elazar ben Azariah's behalf that his beard should turn white overnight. Rabbi Yosef Chaim of Baghdad writes that for this reason, there is a custom for men to treat their birthday as a holiday. Similarly, R. Tzadok HaKohen of Lublin (*Divrei Chalomos* 20) writes that one's date of birth is when his *mazal* is especially strong, and

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# ONEG!

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Rabbi Elchanan Shoff

## PARSHAS VAYESHEV

that every year when that date arrives should not fear anything on that day. He then preempts the question that the Gemara (*Kiddushin* 38a) says that *tzaddikim* tend to die on their birthdays by explaining that for *tzaddikim*, death is not negative, but is actually positive as it gives their *neshamos* a chance to go into the Upper Realms. Moreover, the Talmud Yerushalmi (*Rosh Hashbanah* 3:8) tells that when the Amalekites fought with the Jews after the Exodus, they took advantage of their intimate knowledge of astrology by only drafting people to their army on their birthday, so that they will not as easily fall in battle. Moshe responded by confusing the *mazalos* of that day, so that it would not be apparent whose birthday was then.

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