

QUESTIONS ON PARASHAT VAYESHEV

Q-1. (a) Why does the story of Yosef follow the lineage of *Eisav* at the end of *Parashat Vayishlach*? **(b)** (1) Why is *Eretz Canaan*, where *Ya'akov* settled, called “*eret megurei aviv*” (the land of his father’s sojournings) (6 views)? (2) Why did he settle in *Chevron*, since it was not a suitable place to pasture his flocks? (3) Why did he, rather than *Eisav*, live where his father lived (2 views)? **(c)** (1) Why does 37:2 say, “*eileh toldot Ya'a'kov*” (these are the offspring of *Ya'akov*), referring to all of his children, then name only *Yosef*? (2) How did the life of *Ya'akov* resemble the life of *Yosef* (12 ways)? **(d)** Why did *Ya'akov* (1) love *Yosef* more than his other sons (6 reasons)? (2) give him the *ketonet pasim* (multi-colored cloak), knowing it would arouse sibling rivalry (2 views)? **(e)** Why was *Yosef* called the “*ben zekunim*” of *Ya'akov* (4 views)? (*Bereishit* 37:1-3)

A-1. (a) Of all of *Ya'akov's* offspring, only *Yosef's* offspring will be the antidote to *Edom's* power over *Bnei Yisrael*, and *Yosef's* offspring will be a “flame” to destroy *Edom* like straw – *Ovadya* 1:18 (*Rashi*). **(b)** (1) *Ya'akov* settled (i) permanently where *Yitzchak* was only a “*geir*” (temporary dweller); (ii) where *Yitzchak* converted *geirim*; (iii) while fearing (*gur* = fear) that he had not honored *Yitzchak* while he lived with *Lavan* (*Bereishit Raba*). (iv) where he, unlike *Eisav*, would fulfill the pledge by *Hashem* to *Avraham* of ownership of *Eretz Yisrael* (*Ramban*). (v) near *Eisav*, out of fear, in order to monitor *Eisav's* actions; (vi) in *Chevron*, since the *gematria* of “*megurei aviv*” is the same as “*zeh Chevron*” (this is *Chevron*) (*Ba'al haTurim*). (2) *Chevron* was where his father had successfully drawn people to the service of *Hashem*, and he hoped to continue *Avraham's* and *Yitzchak's* work of influencing people to go under wings of the *Shechina* (*Bereishit Raba*). (3) He lived in the land of his father since (i) he had the rights of the *bechor* (*Rashbam*). (ii) *Canaan* is more suited to developing *kedusha* than elsewhere (*Ha'amek Davar*). **(c)** (1) *Yosef* was the main offspring of *Ya'akov*, since the events in the life of *Yosef* closely resembled those in the life of *Ya'akov*; (2) (i) their barren mothers each bore 2 sons; (ii) each of them was born circumcised; (iii) their brothers hated each of them, (iv) and wanted to kill each of them; (v) *Hashem* made each of them rich; (vi) each of them was married *chutz la'Aretz*; (vii) each of them had prophetic dreams of his greatness; (viii) angels accompanied both the return of *Ya'akov* to *Eretz Yisrael*, and the search by *Yosef* for his brothers; (ix) each of their fathers-in-law (*Lavan* and *Potiphar*) was blessed through them; (x) each of them traveled to *Mitzrayim*; (xi) both made *Yehuda* and his brothers swear that they would have each of them buried in *Eretz Yisrael*; (xii) each of them died in *Mitzrayim*; **(d)** (1) *Yosef* (i) was the firstborn of *Ya'akov's* beloved *Rachel*; (ii) was born in *Ya'akov's* old age, 91; (iii) absorbed, by age 17, all of the knowledge that *Ya'akov* received from *Shem* and *Eiver*; (iv) looked exactly like *Ya'akov*; (v) had experiences like *Ya'akov's* (*Bereishit Raba*). (vi) was destined, *Ya'akov* saw prophetically, for greatness (*Pirkei deRebi Eliezer*). (2) (i) He thought the cloak would evoke “scholars’ jealousy,” causing his brothers to strive for more wisdom (*Bava Batra* 21a). (2) Through the long sleeves of the cloak, *Ya'akov* indicated to his sons that *Yosef* was exempt from manual labor (*Tiferet Tzion*). **(e)** (1) *Yosef* was the child of *Ya'akov's* old age (*Rashi*), and while *Binyamin* was born 8 years after *Yosef* and was a *yeled zekunim* (44:20), *Ya'akov's* love of *Yosef* as a *ben zekunim* was already firmly rooted (*Mizrachi*). (2) *Yosef* was a wise son, and “*zekunim*” comes from “*zeh kana chachma*” (this one acquired wisdom – *Onkelos*). (3) *Yosef* was the son whom *Ya'akov* selected to attend to his personal needs (*Ramban*). (4) *Yosef* had “*ziv ikunur*”, i.e., the same facial features that *Ya'akov* had (*Bereishit Raba*).

Q-2. (a) (1) Why were the brothers of *Yosef* unable to speak to him in a peaceful manner? (2) Why is 37:4 the only place in the *Torah* where the word “*shalom*” is spelled without a *vav*? **(b)** Why did *Yosef* tell his brothers his dreams (6 views)? **(c)** After hearing his 1st dream, 37:8 says, “His brothers hated him even more,” but after his 2nd dream, 37:11 says, “His brothers were jealous of him,” – why did their reactions to each dream differ (2 views)? **(d)** How could the 2nd dream come true, since the moon, which represented *Rachel*, who was *Yosef's* mother, bowed to him, and this event could not take place, since *Rachel* was already dead (3 views)? **(e)** What is the meaning of the phrase, “his (*Yosef's*) father kept the matter in mind” (4 views)? (*Bereishit* 37:5-11)

A-2. (a) (1) Since *Yosef's* brothers were honest people, they could not make believe that they liked him, while, at the same time, hiding their hatred (*Rashi*). (2) It indicates that *Yosef's* brothers could not speak to him even in a partially peaceful manner (*veChur laZahav*). **(b)** (1) His youthful inexperience did not allow him to realize the possible negative consequences of doing so (*Sforno*). (2) Since the dreams featured them, he thought that they should know about them (*Malbim*). (3) They hated him, and he wanted to cause them pain by telling them the dreams (*Radak*). (4) The dreams were prophecies, and a *navi* may not withhold *nevu'a* (*Moshav Zekeinim*). (5) The dreams showed that his future rise to greatness was the Will of *Hashem* (*Chizkuni*). (6) The meaning of a dream depends on its interpretation, and he hoped that his brothers would interpret his dreams favorably (*Ohr haChaim*). **(c)** (1) His brothers thought that the 1st dream was a meaningless image of *Yosef's* daytime thoughts, and they hated his arrogance, but the repetition of the theme showed them that the 1st dream was meaningful, and they were jealous of the dreams that were prophesying his superiority (*Alshich*). (2) The bundles of wheat of the brothers in the 1st dream signified the level of material wealth, and their bowing to the bundles of *Yosef* forecasted their future physical dependence on him for sustenance, but the stars that were featured in the 2nd dream, which symbolized spiritual achievement, by their bowing to *Yosef*, prophesied his higher spirituality, and they hated him for suggesting that they would be materially dependent on him, but they were jealous of his rising over them spiritually (*Beit haLevi*). **(d)** (1) The moon in the dream represented *Bilha*, who raised *Yosef* after *Rachel's* death; (2) no dream is completely true, and some untruths, like the “moon” bowing to him, are always included (*Rashi*). (3) *Yosef* thought that since *Rachel* was dead, the dream would be fulfilled at *techiyat ha-meitim* (the Resurrection), which he thought would take place during the days when *Ya'akov* was alive (*Bereishit Raba*). **(e)** *Ya'akov* (1) waited for the fulfillment of *Yosef's* dreams (*Rashi*). (2) respected the reliability of *Yosef's* dreams and kept them in mind (*Radak*). (3) was not upset at the prediction of his own bowing to *Yosef*, since no man is jealous of his own son (*Ha'amek Davar*). (5) did not fully believe it when his sons later reported that *Yosef* had died, since he believed in the truth of *Yosef's* dreams (*Rashbam*).

Q-3. (a) (1) Why did *Hashem* send an angel (i.e., *Gavriel*, according to *Rashi*) to direct *Yosef* to his brothers, who were plotting to kill him (2 views)? **(b)** When 37:12 says, “The brothers went to shepherd ‘*et tzone aviherm*’ (the flock of their father)”, why, in the *Torah* scroll, does the word “*et*” have 2 dots above it? **(c)** When *Yosef* sought his brothers, what are the meanings of the responses by the angel: (1) “They have traveled from this” (2 views)? (2) “They [his brothers] said, ‘Let’s go to *Dothan*” (3 views)? **(d)** Why is the word “*va-yekachuhu*” (and they took him) spelled without a middle “*vav*”? **(e)** What is the significance of the caravan’s carrying spices (2 views)? **(f)** (1) What is the significance of the sale of *Yosef* by his brothers being for the price of 20 silver pieces (3 views)? (2) Which 2 *halachot* did *Bnei Yisrael* subsequently perform to memorialize the 20 pieces of silver? **(g)** (1) Why did *Reuvein* try to save *Yosef* from being killed by his brothers (2 reasons)? (2) Why was *Reuvein* surprised when he saw that *Yosef* was not in the pit – why was he not there when his brothers sold *Yosef* (2 views)? (*Bereishit* 37:12-17,24-29)

A-3. (a) (1) To confound the wisdom of *Ya'akov*, since he realized that his sons hated *Yosef*, but, nevertheless, illogically sent him to them anyway (*Bereishit Raba*). (2) To show that *Yosef's* leading the family of *Ya'akov* to *Mitzrayim* was the Will of *Hashem* (*Targum Yonatan*). **(b)** It indicates that *Yosef's* brothers shepherded [i.e., indulged] themselves (*Rashi*), with food and drink, which lead to their sin of selling *Yosef* (*Gur Aryeh*). **(c)** (1) *Yosef's* brothers moved away from (i) that particular pasture (*Sforno*). (ii) considering *Yosef* to be their brother (*Rashi*). (2) (i) *Dothan* was a place that was located near *Shechem* (*ibn Ezra*). (ii) They sought *datot* (legal pretexts) in order to justify killing *Yosef* (*Rashi*). (iii) the *gematria* of the word “*Dotan*” is 454, and since *Yehuda* got merit by selling, rather than killing *Yosef*, the offspring of *Yehuda*, from *David* to *Tzidkiyahu*, at the end of the 1st *Beit haMikdash*, reigned for 454 years (*Ba'al haTurim*). **(d)** It denotes the singular (*va-yekha chayhu*), since only one brother, *Shimon*, actually cast him in the pit, but his brothers were also responsible for the sin by not protesting (*Bereishit Raba*). **(e)** It shows how *Hashem* rewards *tzadikim* – (1) although caravans normally carried foul-smelling naphtha, this caravan transported nice fragrances for the benefit of *Yosef* (*Rashi*). (2) The caravan contained small vials, which left room for *Yosef* to ride on a camel, rather than his having to journey on foot (*Ha'amek Davar*). **(f)** (1) (i) *Ya'akov* gave *Yosef* wool in the *ketonet pasim* worth 2 *sela'im* (*Shabbat* 10b), and his 10 brothers each received 2 *sela'im* to compensate for what *Ya'akov* did not give them; (ii) one whose ox kills a slave pays 30 *shekalim* (*Shemot* 21:32), but since his brothers sold *Yosef* secretly, they had to reduce his price by 1/3; (iii) the *erech* (value) of a male aged 5 to 20 is 20 silver pieces (*Vayikra* 27:5), and his brothers sold *Yosef*, who was 17, for that amount (*Ba'al haTurim*). (2) 20 pieces of silver equal 5 *shekalim*, and (i)

since Yosef's brothers sold Yosef, who was the *bechor* (firstborn) of Rachel for 5 *shekalim*, we atone for their sin by redeeming firstborn sons, at the *pidyon ha-ben*, for 5 *shekalim*; (ii) Yosef's 10 brothers, excluding *Binyamin*, who was not there, each received 1/10th of 5 *shekalim*, i.e., ½ *shekel*, which *Bnei Yisrael* contributed annually to the *Beit haMikdash*, which was located in the territory of *Binyamin*, to atone for the sin of Yosef's brothers (*Shekalim* 6a). **(g)** (1) (i) If his brothers ever regretted what they did to Yosef, they would blame him, since he was the oldest; (ii) he was grateful to Yosef, since Ya'akov had banished *Reuvein* from his presence after *Reuvein* sinned by disarranging Ya'akov's couch, but Yosef's dream of the 11 stars showed that *Reuvein* was still counted as an equal to his brothers, since Yosef counted him as an equal among the 11 stars; (2) *Reuvein* was not present at the time of the sale of Yosef, since (i) Yosef's brothers took turns daily going to Ya'akov to serve him, and that day was *Reuvein*'s turn to serve Ya'akov; (ii) after committing his sin of disarranging Ya'akov's couch, *Reuvein* constantly fasted and prayed to do *teshuva*, and when his brothers were sitting down to eat, he left the scene (*Bereishit Raba*).

Q-4. (a) Since *Yevamot* 120b rules that the identity of a corpse cannot be established from the clothing that it has on, since people are liable to lend others their clothing, how did Ya'akov establish that Yosef had died? **(b)** (1) When 37:34 says that Ya'akov "mourned for his son many days", how long did he mourn? (2) Who were the "daughters" who tried to comfort Ya'akov (3 views)? (3) Why was Ya'akov grief so excessive? **(c)** How was Ya'akov punished *mida ke-neged mida* when his sons showed him Yosef's bloody coat? **(d)** What was the job of *Potiphar* (2 views)? (*Bereishit* 37:33-36)

A-4. (a) Ya'akov knew that Yosef treasured the *ketonet passim* too much to lend it out, and articles that are not generally lent to others may be used for identification (*Oznayim laTorah*). **(b)** (1) For 22 years, until he learned that Yosef was alive and safe (*Rashi*). (2) (i) Ya'akov's 13 daughters – each of his 12 sons had a twin sister plus *Dinah*; (ii) Ya'akov's daughters-in-law (*Rashi*). (iii) Ya'akov's granddaughters (*Ramban*). (3) Ya'akov knew that the continued existence of the universe depended on there being 12 *shevatim*, just as there of 12 signs of the zodiac, and he feared that he had committed a sin that caused his losing both the merit of producing 12 *shevatim* and enjoying *olam haba* (*Yalkut Shimoni*). **(c)** Ya'akov fooled his father *Yitzchak* by using goats for the meat that his father expected and by wearing goatskins in order to have the feel of *Eisav*'s skin, and *Bnei Ya'akov* fooled their father by saying that the blood of the goat that was on the cloak of Yosef was Yosef's blood (*Chatam Sofer*). **(d)** (1) *Pharaoh's* Chief Butcher (*Rashi*). (2) *Pharaoh's* Chief Executioner (*Ramban*).

Q-5. (a) How could *Yehuda* marry the daughter of a *Cana'ani*, since *Yitzchak* had prohibited Ya'akov and his family from intermarrying with *Cana'anim*? **(b)** With respect to *Tamar*, (1) why did *Yehuda* think that *Tamar*, who was stationed on the road, "was a harlot, since she had covered her face", since *Sotah* 10a says that a covered face is a sign of modesty, not of being a prostitute? (2) What was the significance of *Tamar's* asking, with *Ru'ach haKodesh*, as collateral for her services, for *Yehuda's* (i) signet ring? (ii) cloak? (iii) staff? (3) How was *Yehuda* punished *mida ke-neged mida* for his behavior towards *Tamar*? (4) Why is the word "te'omim" (twins) spelled fully, with an *alef* and *yud*, but when *Rivka* gave birth, these letters are missing? **(c)** Why does the story of Yosef and the wife of *Potiphar* follow the incident of *Yehuda* and *Tamar* (2 views)? **(d)** Why did Yosef refuse the attempted seduction by the wife of *Potiphar* (7 reasons)? **(e)** Why do the dreams of the officers of *Pharaoh* follow the seduction attempt by the wife of *Potiphar* (2 reasons)? (*Bereishit* 38:2,25-27;39:1,8-12,40:1)

A-5. (a) Here, the word "cana'ani" means "merchant", indicating that *Yehuda* married a daughter from a prominent commercial family (*Pesachim* 50a). **(b)** (1) *Tamar* modestly covered her face during all of the years in which she lived in the home of *Yehuda*, and, therefore, he did not recognize *Tamar* to be the harlot whom he saw on the road (*Rashi*). (2) *Yehuda's* (i) ring indicated that kings and nobles would descend from her; (ii) cloak alluded to the members of the *Sanhedrin*, who always wore *taleisim* and who also would descend from her; (iii) staff referred to *Yehuda's* offspring, the *Mashiach*, about whom *Yeshayah* 11:1 says, "a rod shall come forth from the stem of *Yisha'i*" (*Tiferet Tzion*). (3) *Yehuda* had tormented Ya'akov by asking him to "haker-na" (please identify) the bloody cloak of Yosef, as proof that Yosef was dead, and when *Yehuda* tried to get back the cloak that he gave to *Tamar*, she tormented him by asking him to "haker-na" his cloak which he had given to her (*Maharsha*). (4) Both of the sons of *Yehuda*, *Peretz* and *Zerach*, were fully righteous, but since one of the sons *Rivka*, *Eisav*, was evil, "twins" is spelled defectively (*Rashi*). **(c)** (1) The juxtaposition of these events tells us that just like *Tamar* acted *le-Shem Shamayim* to produce the offspring of *Yehuda*, the wife of *Potiphar* acted *le-Shem Shamayim* when she saw astrologically that the offspring of Yosef would be her offspring, and when Yosef refused her seduction, he fathered her offspring by marrying her daughter *Asenat* (*Rashi*). (2) It shows that "Hashem creates the healing before the illness" (*Megilla* 13b), since before He set in motion sending *Bnei Yisrael* into their first *galut*, He prepared the root of the *Mashiach*, the future redeemer (*Bereishit Raba*). **(d)** (1) It would be a great sin, since the ban on adultery is one of the *sheva mitzvot* of *Bnei Noach* (*Rashi*). (2) He visualized the face of his father saying to him, "For a moment's pleasure, do you want your name deleted from breastplate of the *Kohen Gadol*?" (*Sotah* 36b). (3) Yosef thought that since *Hashem* commanded *Avraham* to sacrifice *Yitzchak*, Ya'akov might choose him as a *korban*, and the *tuma* of adultery would make him unfit as a *korban*; (4) if he were to become defiled, *Hashem* would not reveal Himself to him, in the way that He had revealed Himself to the *Avot*; (5) *Reuvein* lost the *bechora* to Yosef for a lesser sin, and Yosef thought that this sin would certainly cause him to lose the *bechora*; (6) since the lesser sin of *Adam*, by eating the forbidden fruit, brought death to the world, Yosef could not commit the more serious sin of adultery; (7) if *Potiphar* discovered the adultery, Yosef realized that *Potiphar* would have executed him (*Bereishit Raba*). **(e)** (1) Since the rumored seduction by the wife of *Potiphar* caused Yosef to become the focus of gossip in the palace, *Hashem* arranged for the officers to anger *Pharaoh* so that people would talk about them, instead of the righteous Yosef; (2) their jailing caused the eventual freedom from the imprisonment of Yosef that was caused by the wife of *Potiphar* (*Rashi*).

Q-6. (a) Why, after hearing the *Sar haMashkim* describe his dream, does 40:12 say that Yosef "said" (*va-yomer*) the interpretation, but after the dream of the *Sar haOfim* (40:18), Yosef "responded" (*va-ya'an*) with the interpretation? **(b)** Why did (1) Yosef merit burial in *Eretz Yisrael*, but (2) *Moshe* did not? **(c)** What *halacha* do we derive from the 4 times that the word "kos" (cup) is used in the dream of the *Sar haMashkim* and its interpretation? **(d)** What is the significance, with respect to the destiny to *Bnei Yisrael*, of the (1) 3 *sorigim* (branches) of the grapevine in the dream of the *Sar haMashkim* (7 views)? (2) 3 *sarei chori* (wicker baskets) in the dream of the *Sar haOfim*? (*Bereishit* 40:11-18)

A-6. (a) This teaches that one may give good news even when it is not asked for, but for bad news, one still must be truthful, but only when asked (*Oznayim laTorah*). **(b)** (1) Yosef admitted that he came from "Eretz ha'Ivrim" (the land of the Hebrews), even though saying this demeaned him in the eyes of the *Mitzrim*, and this acknowledgement gave Yosef merit for burial in *Eretz Yisrael*; (2) *Moshe* made the daughters of *Yitro* think that he was an "Ish Mitzri" (Egyptian – *Shemot* 2:19), not an *Ivri*, and for this deception, *Moshe* did not merit burial in *Eretz Yisrael* (*Devarim Raba*). **(c)** We drink 4 cups of wine at the *Pesach Seder*, since, just as Yosef was rescued from prison through the dream of the *Sar haMashkim*, *Bnei Yisrael* would be redeemed from *Mitzrayim*, as symbolized by the *arba kosot* (*Kli Yakar*). **(d)** The branches represent (1) the 3 whose merit protect *Bnei Yisrael*, i.e., (i) the 3 "sarei gei'im" (exalted nobles) who are present in each generation; (ii) the 3 "sarei goyim" (ministering angels among the 70 nations) in each generation; (iii) the 3 *avot*; (iv) *Moshe*, *Aharon* and *Miriam*, who lead *Bnei Yisrael* in the *midbar*; (v) the *Beit haMikdash*, the king and the *Kohen Gadol*; (vi) the well, the *Ananei Hakavod* and the *mun* in the *midbar* that sustained *Bnei Yisrael* in the *midbar*; (vii) the *shalosh regalim*; (2) The baskets represent the 3 exiles that *Bnei Yisrael* will undergo, but from which they will be redeemed, after which they will be subjected to a final 4th exile, which will be more bitter than the previous 3 exiles (*Chulin* 92a).

Q-7. In the *haftara*, the *Navi* says that *Hashem* will send *Bnei Yisrael* into *galut* for which sin? (*Amos* 2:6)

A-7. While *Bnei Yisrael* committed the cardinal sins of idolatry, murder and immorality, the verdict of exile was sealed for *Bnei Yisrael's* selling innocent people into slavery for silver, and poor people for shoes (*Radak*), just like the brothers of Yosef sold him into exile from *Eretz Yisrael* for silver which they used to buy shoes, and which led to exile in *Mitzrayim* (*Ba'al haTurim*).