



## Wembley Synagogue

### וישב

#### Insights from the commentators into the Sedra of Vayeshev

וַיָּבֵא יוֹסֵף אֶת דְּבָרֵיהֶם רָעָה אֶל אָבִיהֶם - And Yosef brought negative reports about them to their father (37:2)

Why does the verse say אֶל אָבִיהֶם "to their father" and not אֶל אָבִיו "to his father?" Also, in the previous verse, the Torah notes that Yosef was seventeen years old at the time. Why does the Torah want us to know his age?

The Chatam Sofer explains that the Torah means to inform us of Yosef's motive for speaking about his brothers' misbehaviour. He told Yaakov about it because Yaakov was their father and as such Yaakov was obligated to educate them about right and wrong. Similarly, the Torah does not say וַיִּסְפָּר - and Yosef "told" Yaakov what the brothers had done. Instead, the Torah uses the term וַיָּבֵא "and he brought" the negative reports. This term informs us that Yosef was careful not to exaggerate the wrongs that had been committed. He *brought* the facts forward exactly as they were.

In telling us Yosef's age, the Torah reveals why Yosef did not rebuke his brothers himself. They were older than him, so he was certain that they would not listen to his rebuke. Therefore, Yosef brought the information to their father. (Source: Parsha Pearls)

כִּי בֶן זָקְנִים הוּא לוֹ - Since he was the son of his old age (37:3)

The Ramban asks the question: what the Torah means when it describes Yosef as a child of Yaakov's old age? Ramban begins by summarizing the views of other commentators. Onkelos translates "בֶּן זָקְנִים" that "he was a wise son to him." Because the Rabbis say that all the Torah that Yaakov had learnt from Shem and Eiver was taught to Yosef. (The word זָקֵן commonly translated as "old" can also be used to denote learned in Torah (as in Vayikra 19:32). Another interpretation of בֶּן זָקְנִים is that the Yosef's face was very much like his father Yaakov's (according to this view quoted by Rashi, בֶּן זָקְנִים is a contraction of the Aramaic זִי אִיקוֹנֵי זִי meaning likeness of his face)

Ibn Ezra says that בֶּן זָקְנִים means that he literally fathered him in his old age (when he was 90 years old). Ramban further discusses Onkelos' interpretation and says that "he was a wise son to him" meaning that Yosef was a perceptive and wise son in his father's eyes and his insight was like the insight of older people, mature rather than childish.

וַיַּעֲשֶׂה לוֹ כְּתוֹנֶת פָּסִים - He made for him a "tunic of fine wool" (37:3) [The commentators discuss various interpretations of כְּתוֹנֶת פָּסִים translated here as "tunic of fine wool"]

The Gemara Shabbat 10b says: "Rava bar Machasya said in the name of Rav Chama bar Gurya, in the name of Rav: A person should never favour one son over his other sons. For *on account of two selas\** of fine wool that Yaakov gave to Yosef above his other sons, the brothers became jealous of him and, as a result, our ancestors went down to Egypt.

Tosafot says that the Egyptian exile was already decreed (see Bereshit 15:13) long before. However, of the four hundred years "in a land not theirs" mentioned in Avraham's vision only 210 years were spent in Egypt, and the period of actual oppression was even shorter. So perhaps were it not for the favoritism Yaakov showed Yosef, this period would have been shorter still.

*\*On account of the two selas* – Rashi notes that a tunic weighs a great deal more than two selas, therefore he explains that Rav was speaking loosely. As an alternative explanation Rashi cites the view of Rabbi Yitzchak haLevi that the special part of this tunic, for which it was called a *ketonet passim*, was only a strip of fine wool around the palm (*pas*) of the hand. This small piece may have indeed weighed no more than two selas. (Source: Illuminations – Bereshit)

כְּתוֹנֶת פָּסִים - "tunic of fine wool"

The cloak that Yosef wore was made of פָּסִים (*passim*). Some say that means silk. Rashi says wool. Radak says colours and Targum Yonatan says drawings. Rashi quotes the Midrash Bereshit Rabbah (84:8) which suggest that the word פָּסִים (*passim*) is an acronym for the terrible events that would befall Yosef as a result of his sale by his brothers.

פ refers to פוטיפר (Potifar) in whose home Yosef would undergo the trial of passion with his master's wife, ס refers to the סוחרים (Socharim – the travelling merchants) to whom he would be sold, י refers to the ישמאלים (Ishmaelites) the nomadic Arabs who would

buy him from the merchants and finally the מ refers to the מדינים (Midianites) or מדנים (Medanim) who bought him from the Arabs and sold him to Potiphar in Egypt.

וַיַּחְלֵם יוֹסֵף חֲלֹם וַיַּגִּד לְאֶחָיו וַיִּסְפוּ עוֹד שְׂנֵא אֹהָבוֹ - And Yosef dreamt a dream which he told to his brothers, and they hated him even more (37:5)

Yosef had not yet revealed the contents of his dream; he merely told his brothers that he had had a dream. Why did this cause the brothers to increase their hatred towards him? The commentators explain that because of the brothers' great hatred of Yosef, they had already assumed that all his dreams would be for his benefit and at their expense. Therefore they hated him more before they had even heard the dream. (Source: Something to Say)

Why did Yosef relate his dreams to his brothers if he knew that they hated him? (V 5-11) This question is treated by commentators in different ways:

The *Rosh* says: According to Jewish Law, a person is prohibited from withholding a prophecy that he received (Sanhedrin 89a). Therefore, Yosef was obligated to relate his prophetic dream which described how he would rule over his brothers, despite what the consequences might be.

*Abarbanel* says the events predicted by a dream only materialize according to the way they are interpreted (Berachot 55b). Since Yosef knew that his brothers hated him, he wanted to give them the opportunity to calm their hatred by allowing them to interpret his dreams.

*Sforno* says: Yosef was immature, and he made an unwise move.

*Radak* says that he wanted to enrage the brothers further, because they had shown hatred for him.

*Chizkuni* says that Yosef was trying to show that the brothers need not be angry at their father for showing favoritism to him, because Yosef's greatness was in fact divinely decreed, as was evident from the prophetic dream.

Ohr Hachayim says that Yosef wanted to indicate to his brothers that it was unwise to hate him because one day they would need him.

וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ לֵךְ נָא רְאֵה אֶת שְׁלוֹם אֶחָיֶךָ - And (Yaakov) said to him: "Go now, see whether it is well with your brothers." (37:14)

This verse could also be understood as "Go now and see the perfection of your brothers..." Yaakov told Yosef to go and behold the perfection (shleimut, from shalom) of his brothers: "Consider their virtues rather than their shortcomings," Yaakov said to his son, "and you will avoid strife and contention with them." (Source: Rabbi Simcha Bunim of Pshischa - quoted in Ma'ayna Shel Torah)

Let everyone see the virtues of others and not their faults (Source: Prayer of the Noam Elimelech - quoted in Ma'ayna Shel Torah)

וַיִּכְרָה וַיֹּאמֶר כְּתָנֶת בְּנֵי חַיָּה רָעָה אֲכָלָתָהּ - (Yaakov immediately) recognised it. He said "it is my son's coat! A wild beast ate him!" (37:33)

Why did Yaakov immediately assume that Yosef was eaten by a wild beast rather than killed by bandits? The *Rabbeinu Bachaye* explains that had bandits attacked Yosef, they surely would have taken his expensive, colourful coat that Yaakov had made for him. Therefore, when Yaakov saw the coat, he concluded that a wild beast must have devoured Yosef. (Source: A Gut Vort)

וְלֹא זָכַר שֵׁר הַמִּשְׁקִים אֶת יוֹסֵף וַיִּשְׁכַּח - And the Chief Butler did not remember Yosef. And he forgot him (40:23)

Upon the Butler's release from prison, Yosef asked him to speak to Pharaoh on his behalf and help get him released from prison. The butler, however, forgot about Yosef once he was freed. Rashi comments that because Yosef placed his trust in the butler, he was punished with two more years in prison.

Why did Yosef deserve such a punishment? Rabbi Moshe Feinstein in *Darash Moshe* points out that Yosef should have understood that the prison sentences of the butler and baker, their confusing dreams and their entreaty to Yosef for interpretations were all occurrences designed by Hashem. Yosef should have understood that his freedom was not dependent on his own efforts; Hashem had already orchestrated his release. (Source: Something to Say)

Shabbat Shalom!



**Shabbat starts 3.36pm**



**Shabbat ends: 4.46pm**

The *Insights into the Sedra* sheet is edited by Chazan Anthony Wolfson

Online at: [http://www.wembleysynagogue.org/html/sedra\\_notes.html](http://www.wembleysynagogue.org/html/sedra_notes.html)