

# PARSHAS VAYEISHEV

*by Gedalia Litke*

The psukim at the end of the Parsha describe the dreams of Yosef's co- prisoners. The description of these two men alternates between referring to them as Sar Hamashkim/Sar HaOfim (Minister of Drinks/Minister of Baking or Chief Butler/Chief Baker), an official title, and referring to them simply as the 'mashkeh' and the 'ofeh', the butler and the baker. Why the differences?

Specifically, the psukim say that the butler and baker sinned against their master Pharaoh (40:1); that Pharaoh became enraged against the Chief Butler and Chief Baker (40:2); that the baker and butler had dreams in prison (40:5); that Yosef told them that dream interpretations are up to HaShem and that the Chief Butler told Yosef his dream (40:8-9); that the Chief Baker also told Yosef his dream (40:16); that on his birthday Pharaoh once again counted the Chief Butler and Chief Baker among his servants (40:20); that Pharaoh re-instated the Chief Butler but hanged the Chief Baker (40:21-22); and that the Chief Butler forgot about Yosef (40:23).

The Sforno provides much of the explanation. It was an ordinary butler and baker who made the mistakes - 'sinned against Pharaoh' - this explains 40:1; Pharaoh became enraged against the Chiefs because it was their job to make sure their workers didn't make such mistakes - the Chiefs were held accountable and were thrown into prison. This explains 40:2. In prison they became a shadow of their former selves and no longer had any ambitions of achieving high position; therefore when they dream (40:5) they are referred to only as the butler and the baker, not the Chiefs.

From this explanation of the Sforno we can perhaps extrapolate the rest. Although despondent as a result of their seemingly unintelligible dreams, once Yosef reached out to them and told them interpretations are possible because Hashem is in charge of interpretations (see also Sforno on 40:8) they brightened up and regained some of their former confidence - even before the dreams were interpreted. Therefore when reporting the substance of the dream the dreamer is again referred to as Chief Butler (40:9). After Yosef gives the first interpretation the other dreamer is certainly feeling positive about his prospects and he, too, is referred to as Chief Baker when reporting to Yosef the substance of his dream (40:16). Obviously, they are both Chiefs again when Pharaoh counts them in among the servants (40:20) and the Chief Butler is exactly that when he is re- instated (40:21) and when he forgets Yosef (40:23). Finally, the one who is hanged is still referred to as Chief Baker (40:22), because he was hanged in his capacity as Chief, not merely as a baker.

