

# THAT THE TORAH OF HASHEM SHOULD BE IN YOUR MOUTH

*by Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom*

Our Parashah is the first to introduce Mitzvot which are an expression of the unique and exclusive relationship between G-d and the B'nei Yisra'el (note the comments of Rashi on B'resheet 1:1).

Along with the many details regarding the Korban Pesach (which we hope to revisit in anticipation of Pesach later this year), the commemoration of the Exodus is marked with the obligation to sanctify the first-born (people and animals), celebrate the anniversary of the Exodus by feasting for seven days, avoiding Hametz and relating the story to our children - and by wearing T'fillin. (all found in Sh'mot 13:1-16). It is the reason given for this final Mitzvah that I'd like to address this week as a springboard for entering into a discussion which properly belongs to next week's Parashah. Since it is, however, a two-part essay, we will begin our analysis this week in order to complete it in a timely fashion.

In defining the purpose of T'fillin, the Torah states:

In order that the Torah of Hashem shall be in your mouth (13:9).

Although the most straightforward understanding of this phrase relates to the following phrase: "that Hashem your G-d took you out of Egypt with a strong hand", nonetheless, it is Halakhically understood as relating to the entire Torah.

Thus, for instance, the Midrash Halakhah states:

"...in order that the Torah of Hashem should be in your mouth" - based on this text, the Rabbis stated that anyone who puts on T'fillin is considered as if he studied the Torah and anyone who studies the Torah is exempt from T'fillin. (Mekhilta Bo #17 - see Shulhan Arukh OC 38:10).

Note that the Mekhilta did not limit this Halakhah to someone studying about the Exodus - any study of Torah exempts one from wearing T'fillin. Regardless of how this Halakhah is practically understood and applied, the Halakhah understands that the verse is referring to the overall study of Torah and engagement in G-d's law.

Although there are a few mentions of the importance of engagement in Torah study in the Torah itself, the clearest and most powerful expression in T'nakh is found in the opening section of Sefer Yehoshua:

This Book of the Torah shall not depart from your mouth; but you shall meditate on it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written on it; for then you shall make your way prosperous, and then you shall have good success. (1:8)

This command, given to Yehoshua, sets an important tone for this Sefer - one to which we will return in next week's essay.

In the meantime, since we will first meet Yehoshua in next week's Parashah, let's take this opportunity to analyze - if only briefly - this first post-Toraic Navi and hero of the conquest of Eretz K'na'an.

## II

### ENTER YEHOSHUA

When we are first introduced to Yehoshua, we are given neither biographical background nor a resume which would explain his qualifications for being appointed by Mosheh to defend the B'nei Yisra'el against the attack of the nomadic Amalekites:

Then came Amalek, and fought with Yisra'el in Rephidim. And Mosheh said to Yehoshua, Choose for us men, and go out, fight with Amalek; tomorrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the rod of G-d in my hand. So Yehoshua did as Mosheh had said to him, and fought with Amalek; and Mosheh, Aharon, and Hur went up to the top of the hill... (Sh'mot 17:8-10)

Note that we do not even know his patronym nor his tribal affiliation - he is just "Yehoshua".

Although we later find out that he had a shorter name (Hoshea - Bamidbar 13:16), that his father's name is "Nun" (Sh'mot 33:11) and that he is an Ephraimite (Bamidbar 13:8), we learn very little else about him until Mosheh is told that Yehoshua will be the next "shepherd" of the B'nei Yisra'el and some of his leadership qualities (Bamidbar 27:18-20). It is only through the unfolding of Sefer Yehoshua itself that we get a complete picture of the son of Nun, Mosheh's disciple and the man who leads the B'nei Yisra'el through what is arguably the pinnacle of their military strength.

## III

### YEHOSHUA 24:

### TWO QUESTIONS

We will frame this week's essay by raising two questions about Yehoshua (both the man and the Sefer) which arise from the final chapter of that book. In Chapter 24 (best known for its historiosophy [vv. 2-13], a section of which [vv. 2-4] is incorporated into the Haggadah shel Pessach), set in Sh'khem, Yehoshua brings the B'nei Yisra'el into a covenant with G-d just before his death. We are then told:

And Yehoshua wrote these words B'sefer Torat Elokim (in the Book of the Torah of G-d)... (v. 26)

What could this phrase possibly mean? Does it mean that "Sefer Torat Elokim" is a reference to some other book, besides the Five Books of Mosheh (so Y. Kil in Da'at Mikra among other contemporary scholars)? Does the prefix "B" indicate that Yehoshua wrote the conditions of the covenant on a scroll and rolled it inside of the Torah of Mosheh (so Rashi, quoting the Targum)?

In any case, this text needs clarification.

There is a more enigmatic verse near the conclusion of the Sefer. After the death and burial of Yehoshua, we are told that:

And the bones of Yoseph, which the B'nei Yisra'el brought out of Egypt, buried they in Sh'khem, in a parcel of ground which Ya'akov bought from the sons of Hamor the father of Sh'khem for a hundred pieces of silver; and it became the inheritance of the sons of Yoseph.

We know that the B'nei Yisra'el carried Yoseph's bones through the desert (see Sh'mot 13:19) in order to inter them in K'na'an (see B'resheet 50:25) - but why did they wait until after the death of Yehoshua to do so?

From all of the information we can glean from the text, Yehoshua was approximately 80 years old at the time of the conquest (see Yehoshua 14:6-10, especially v. 7) - and he died at the age of 110 (24:29).

Why did the B'nei Yisra'el keep Yoseph's bones "on ice" for those thirty years and only inter him in Sh'khem after the death and burial of Yehoshua? This question is exacerbated by the fact that the B'nei Yisra'el held a major covenant ceremony upon their arrival in the land - again at Sh'khem. Even if Yoseph's final resting place was pre-determined as Sh'khem, they had been there fairly soon after crossing the Yarden - why wait until Yehoshua's career was over before interring Yoseph?

#### IV

#### BACK TO YOSEPH AND HIS DREAMS

In order to answer these questions - and, thereby, gain a greater understanding of the role of

Yehoshua within Israelite history - we need to go back to the first significant interaction between Yoseph (Yehoshua's ancestor) and his brothers:

As we know (and have discussed in an earlier essay), Yoseph was involved in three sets of dreams - each set consisting of two dreams:

- 1) His own dreams, presented below (B'resheet 37)
- 2) His successful interpretation of the dreams of the butler and baker (B'resheet 40)
- 3) His successful interpretation of the two dreams of Pharaoh (B'resheet 41)

Even a cursory look at these three sets reveals that the first two dreams bear little in common with the two latter sets. Each of the latter sets was clearly understood by all involved as a form of prophecy - and each of the details was meticulously interpreted by Yoseph - and each of those interpretive details came to pass. Note, for instance, Ramban's comments at the beginning of Ch. 41, (v. 4) where he points out that even Yoseph's "advice" to Pharaoh was part of the dream interpretation.

The three days, the seven years, the "fat" and "emaciated" stalks and cows, the basket on the baker's head - all of this is accounted for in the interpretation - and every detail comes to pass exactly "as Yoseph had interpreted to them".

This clear and direct interpretive process stands in clear contradistinction to the two dreams dreamt by Yoseph himself:

And Yoseph dreamed a dream, and he told it to his brothers; and they hated him even more. And he said to them: Hear, I beg you, this dream which I have dreamed; For, behold, we were binding sheaves in the field, and, lo, my sheaf arose, and also stood upright; and, behold, your sheaves stood around, and made obeisance to my sheaf. And his brothers said to him, Shall you indeed reign over us? or shall you indeed have dominion over us? And they hated him even more for his dreams, and for his words. And he dreamed yet another dream, and told it his brothers, and said, Behold, I have again dreamed a dream; and, behold, the sun and the moon and the eleven stars made obeisance to me. And he told it to his father, and to his brothers; and his father rebuked him, and said to him, What is this dream that you have dreamed? Shall I and your mother and your brothers indeed come to bow down ourselves to you to the earth? And his brothers envied him; but his father kept the matter in mind. (B'resheet 37:5-11)

Besides the painful questions that must be addressed regarding the wisdom of Yoseph's revealing these dreams to his brothers - which will be assessed in a later study - the simplest question to ask

here is - when are these dreams ever realized? Do the brothers ever bow to Yoseph? Certainly the second dream seems to "fall flat" - for mother isn't even alive (see Rashi ad loc., quoting BT Berakhot) and father certainly never "bows down [himself] to the earth".

Besides the issue of the fulfillment of the dream, there is another question to ask here. It is clear why the prisoners had two dreams - each had his own dream, relating to his own future - and the import of each dream was diametrically opposite. It is also explicitly stated why Pharaoh had two dreams -

And for that the dream was doubled to Pharaoh twice; it is because the matter is established by G-d, and G-d will shortly bring it to pass. (41:32)

Why, however, did Yoseph have two dreams - two dreams with essentially the same message? If we are to focus on the addition of father and mother (the sun and moon) in the second dream, why not just grant Yoseph that one dream, which includes the subjugation of his brothers?

V

#### RAV SAMET'S EXPLANATION

Rav Elhanan Samet, of Makhon Herzog, suggests that we are misled in our understanding of Yoseph's dreams because we assume that the reactive-interpretations of both brothers and father are accurate. To wit, we believe that both dreams foretell Yoseph's future role as "king" of the family and that his brothers, father and mother(!) will bow to him in subjugation. That understanding seems to be adopted by Yoseph himself, as reflected by the evocation of these dreams when the brothers appear before him in Egypt:

And Yoseph knew his brothers, but they knew not him. And Yoseph remembered the dreams which he dreamed of them, (42:8-9)

Rashi, ad loc., comments that now Yoseph saw the dreams fulfilled, since his brothers were bowing to him. Ramban disagrees and maintains that as a result of Yoseph remembering the dreams, he realized that they were not yet fulfilled, since father was not yet here, nor were all the brothers. (Ramban utilizes this interpretation to defend Yoseph against the claim that he erred in not notifying his father that he was alive and well. See the Akedat Yitzhak ad loc. for a critique of Ramban's approach).

One could argue that the brothers never did bow to Yoseph -for even when they bowed to the Egyptian governor, they did not know of his identity. The essence of subjugation lies in awareness - the slave prostrates himself before his liege because he is aware that that selfsame ruler is his

master. If the brothers bowed to the Egyptian Tzaph'nat Pa'aneach, that seems to have little, if anything, to do with the fulfillment of these dreams.

The only time that they knowingly bowed to Yoseph was after father Ya'akov's death (50:18) - and it seems difficult to see this act, over 40 years after Yoseph's dreams, as having anything to do with them.

Rav Samet suggests that we err in understanding Yoseph's dreams as the brothers did - because we aren't paying sufficient attention to "dream language". Since we accept the notion that the sheaves, stars, sun and moon are all symbolic - why are we assuming that the prostration is literal? If we interpret the dreams consistently, then we should understand the prostration of the family members as a symbolic act.

What, then, could their bowing to brother Yoseph symbolize?

Although bowing often indicates subservience, we find numerous occasions where it has other uses. For instance, Avraham bows to the Hittites twice during his negotiations for the Cave of Makhpelah (23:7,12) - and Avraham certainly did not accept their dominion (they called him a prince). We also find that Ya'akov bowed to Yoseph (albeit without prostration - he was in bed) when Yoseph committed to burying Ya'akov in K'na'an (47:31).

In other words, the act of bowing within T'nakh context may indicate appreciation and dependence - without implying subservience or servitude.

Let's see how this understanding of "prostration" (in dream language) plays out in an interpretation of Yoseph's dreams:

#### A: THE FIRST DREAM

The first dream, involving the sheaves, has clear literary "markers" which set off three independent scenes - each introduced with the word "Hinei":

- 1) For, behold, we were binding sheaves in the field, and,
- 2) lo, my sheaf arose, and also stood upright; and,
- 3) behold, your sheaves stood around, and made obeisance to my sheaf.

The framework and setting of this dream are clear - the field, representing agriculture and sustenance.

In the first scene, the brothers are all working together - representing a common economic venture. This is most plainly understood as representing the period of "the present" - when the entire family is still working as one cohesive financial unit.

In the second scene, only Yoseph is present - the brothers are "off-stage". In other words, there will be a period in the future when Yoseph will comprise an independent financial unit, separate from that of the family. This sheaf rises and stands upright - implying consistent and stable financial success in this new, independent position.

The final scene (the focus of the brothers' angry reaction) has the brothers (represented by their sheaves) bowing to Yoseph (represented by his sheaf. Once we understand "bowing" as symbolizing a relationship of dependence, we can clearly see the complete realization of this dream. When Yoseph finally revealed himself to his brothers, one of the first things he said was:

And there will I nourish you; (45:11).

Again, after the burial of Ya'akov:

Now therefore do not fear; I will nourish you, and your little ones. (50:21)

The entire family was totally dependent on Yoseph for their sustenance - a role he was only too happy to fulfill.

We might even argue that this "enlightened" understanding of the meaning of the dreams occurred to Yoseph when his brothers came before his throne:

And Yoseph remembered the dreams which he dreamed of them, (42:9) The word "Lahem" (of them) may be translated "about them"; to wit: he remembered the dreams that he dreamt about his brothers. It may, alternatively, be understood as "on their behalf", meaning "he remembered the dreams that he dreams for them." In other words, Yoseph now understood that he had risen to this great position in order to help the family out of their present financial crisis (see our essay on Parashat Vayyigash this year).

The first dream is not only less threatening to the brothers, but every detail comes true.

## B: THE SECOND DREAM

Beside the shift from the agricultural to the cosmic arena (and the apparent inclusion of father and mother), the second dream is distinct from the first in that Yoseph is consistently represented as himself. The stars bow - not to Yoseph's star, rather to Yoseph himself.

If we are to explain these dreams with the same rigorous attention to detail as Yoseph employs in interpreting dreams in Egypt, we must take this nuance into account. In addition to this, we must also address the overall question of what new message this dream is conveying; otherwise, what need is there for a second dream?

Again, we must focus on the setting of the dream: The stars above. What do the stars represent in Sefer B'resheet (and throughout T'nakh)? The answer is quite simple: The stars represent the B'nei Yisra'el. Note B'resheet 22:17 (Avraham), 26:4 (Yitzhak), Sh'mot 32:13 (the Avot as a group), D'varim 10:22 (Mosheh).

[Parenthetical note: Although the B'nei Yisra'el are also compared, in their vast numbers, to the sand by the shore (e.g. B'resheet 22:17, 32:16, Hoshea 2:1), Haza"l sensitively point out that these do not reflect the same type of greatness:

This people is likened to the dust and it is likened to the stars. When they go down, they go down to the dust, and when they rise they rise to the stars. [BT Megillah 16a]

The comparison to the stars is, therefore, not just about the sheer multitude of Avraham's children - it is about their greatness, nobility and achievement of the objectives of that great blessing.)

Once we take this symbolism into account, the meaning of the second dream - and its significance independent of the first dream - becomes apparent. Again utilizing our interpretation that in dreamspeak prostration implies a dependence, the second dream means that the success of the family, as the continuation of the Avrahamic tribe and tradition, will be wholly dependent (at least at one point in time) on Yoseph.

Here is where the difference between the dreams, noted above, comes into play. Whereas Yoseph was represented by a sheaf in the first dream - putting him on somewhat equal billing (if not footing) as his kin, in the second dream they are all represented by heavenly bodies while Yoseph appears as himself.

The meaning becomes quite clear when we understand that the message of this dream is that Yoseph will be the one responsible for managing, maintaining and ensuring the success of the family in their noblest and most critical endeavor: Being a blessing for all of Mankind (B'resheet 12:3).

Indeed, upon the descent of the family to Egypt (B'resheet 46), Yoseph uses his position and cunning to create favorable conditions for the family to prosper - spiritually as well as economically - in their new environs. When presenting his brothers to Pharaoh, Yoseph advises them:



And it shall come to pass, when Pharaoh shall call you, and shall say, What is your occupation? That you shall say, Your servants' trade has been keeping cattle from our youth until now, both we, and also our fathers; that you may live in the land of Goshen; for every shepherd is an abomination to the Egyptians. (46:33-34)

We now understand why Yoseph appears "as himself" in the second dream. It is not Yoseph as a "symbol" or as a figurehead that will ensure the survival and success of the family; rather, it is Yoseph as a person, using his own personality, charm and cunning, who will help keep the family alive.

This is most clearly seen in Yoseph's final words:

And Yoseph said to his brothers, I die; and G-d will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land to the land which he swore to Avraham, to Yitzhak, and to Ya'akov. And Yoseph took an oath from the B'nei Yisra'el, saying, G-d will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones from here. (50:24-25). How powerful a statement: It is Yoseph, the man who succeeded in Egypt like no other foreigner could have, the man who engineered the family's descent and resettlement there - it is that selfsame Yoseph who keeps the dream alive and reminds his brothers that "this is not home" and that G-d will surely bring them back home.

VI

## THE SUN AND THE MOON

The section above is a synopsis (faithful, I hope) of Rav Samet's explanation of Yoseph's dreams.

There is one major problem with his explanation - the role of the sun and the moon. Although it would be tempting to accept his explanation - that the success not only of the children but also of their parents - is dependent on Yoseph, I believe that this is insufficient. If we accept the stars as symbolic of the B'nei Yisra'el, then the sun and moon have no place in their orbit. Although the sun and moon appear as the chief heavenly bodies throughout T'nakh (e.g. B'resheet 1:16, T'hilim 148:3, Iyyov 9:7), they are never associated with the B'nei Yisra'el.

The answer to this final "missing piece" of the puzzle of Yoseph's dreams is found much later in Israelite history. Whereas the "sheaf" dream is fulfilled rather immediately - within the lives of all who were originally involved with the dream - the "stars" dream is only realized after a number of generations.

Before suggesting a solution to this puzzle, I'd like to point out one last anomaly - this time at the end of Sefer B'resheet:

And Yoseph lived in Egypt, he, and his father's house; and Yoseph lived a hundred and ten years...So Yoseph died, being a hundred and ten years old; (50:22,26)

Why does the text mention his life-span twice within a matter of five verses? Even Mosheh, whose age of 120 becomes the archetype for the life of an extraordinary person (e.g. Rabbi Akiva), only has his final age mentioned once (D'varim 34:7. Mosheh does own up to his age in his farewell speech - [31:2], but that is a full three chapters away and within the context of his speech. Yoseph is still the only person in Torah whose age at death is mentioned by the text twice).

I'd like to suggest that although Yoseph died in Egypt at the age of 110, his mission (as laid out in the dreams) was not yet complete and would not be complete until the B'nei Yisra'el were brought back to Eretz Yisra'el as a nation.

This mission would only be accomplished through his descendant, Yehoshua bin-Nun, of the tribe of Ephraim - who lived to the ripe old age of 110.

## VII

### BACK TO YESHOSHUA

Although Yehoshua had the allegiance of all of the tribes of Yisra'el - more so than any leader since - his greatest moment was undoubtedly during the battle against the alliance of the five southern kings, as their armies fled the B'nei Yisra'el down the slopes of Beit Horon:

Then spoke Joshua to Hashem in the day when Hashem delivered the Amorites before the people of Yisra'el, and he said in the sight of Yisra'el, Sun, stand still upon Gibeon; and you, Moon, in the valley of Ayalon. And the sun stood still, and the moon stayed, until the people had avenged themselves upon their enemies. Is not this written in the Book of Yashar? So the sun stood still in the midst of heaven, and hastened not to go down about a whole day. And there was no day like that before it or after it, when Hashem listened to the voice of a man; for Hashem fought for Yisra'el.

(Yehoshua 10:12-14)

There was never a man to whom the sun and moon showed obeisance - save Yehoshua bin-Nun, a member of the tribe of Ephraim, a son of Yoseph.

We now understand why Yoseph's bones were kept with Yehoshua's army until his storied career came to a close. Yehoshua's task was Yoseph's - that which the ancestor had begun, the descendant had to complete.

We also understand why there is a veiled reference to the possible inclusion of Sefer Yehoshua in the canon of Torah at the end of the Sefer:

And Yehoshua wrote these words B'sefer Torat Elokim since Yehoshua's mission was the completion of the task of that hero of Sefer B'resheet, his ancestor Yoseph. Although Sefer Yehoshua remains outside of the Torah, the many textual and thematic associations which bind it to the Humash will be the focus of next week's shiur, as we attempt to understand Yehoshua, the man, the leader and the disciple of Moshe Rabbenu.

VIII

POSTSCRIPT:

SEFER HAYASHAR

In the critical section from Yehoshua 10 quoted above, the text states that this story and/or prayer/song was written in Sefer haYashar. What is this book?

Most scholars follow Ibn Ezra's lead (Bamidbar 21:14) that the T'nakh text will refer to Sefarim that existed at the time of the T'nakh and are lost to us (e.g. Sefer Milhamot Hashem, Sefer haYashar, Sefer haShir), Haza"l interpret Sefer haYashar as referring to any number of books within the canon. In the central Talmudic section, the first essay is:

What is the Sefer haYashar? - Said R. Hiyya b. Abba in the name of R. Yohanan: It is the book of Avraham, Yitzhak and Ya'akov, who are designated as Yesharim (righteous), (BT Avodah Zarah 25a)

Although the Gemara goes on to find a faint allusion to the miracle of the sun and moon standing still, I'd like to suggest that if Sefer haYashar is indeed Sefer B'resheet, the text is quite clear in asking: Is it not written in Sefer haYashar?

Indeed, it is clearly written:

Behold, I have again dreamed a dream; and, behold, the sun and the moon and the eleven stars made obeisance to me.

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