

PARASHAT VAYIGASH



אִישׁ נָבוֹן וְחָכָם

A Man with Insight and Wisdom

■ One Who Gets Things Done

We learned in Parashat Miketz that as soon as Yosef completed interpreting King Pharaoh's double dream, he added some words of practical advice for the monarch. He suggested that the king appoint a capable, talented man who would be able to both administer the country's upcoming years of plenty and prepare for the years of famine that were to follow: *"Let Pharaoh now seek out a man with insight and wisdom, and place him in charge of Egypt."* (B'reshit 41,33)

Pharaoh takes to the idea with alacrity – and chooses Yosef himself: *"Since G-d has informed you about all this, there is none as understanding and wise as you"* (verse 39). The words *understanding and wise* refer not only to the ability to interpret dreams, but mainly to the organization and implementation of the massive, detailed plan that Yosef outlined to prepare for the approaching famine throughout the entire Egyptian kingdom.

Yosef clearly has this ability, as Pharaoh instinctively sees – but he is even more skilled than that: He was also able to implement the Divine program for the fulfillment of the Covenant Between the Pieces that G-d forged with Avraham some 200 years earlier. In that covenant, known as the *Brit Bein HaBetarim* (B'reshit 15), Hashem told Avraham that his descendants would be enslaved in a foreign land, and would then return home to Eretz Yisrael – but He did not say how this would actually come about.

The Torah devotes much space to the story of how Yosef, with wisdom and insight, managed first to orchestrate the arrival of his entire family in Egypt, and then to help Yaakov and all his descendants – Bnei Yisrael – settle there comfortably, and specifically in the choice area of Goshen. The Torah tells us this so that we can understand why Hashem chose specifically Yosef as the man to prepare and pave the way for the wondrous growth of the Nation of Israel in a land not theirs.

Yosef allocates the most fruitful and valuable piece of real estate in all of Egypt, the Goshen district, for his father and brothers. It is also in close proximity to the homes of the top government ministers and officials, and certainly near the residence of Yosef himself. Yosef tells his brothers to rush home and tell their father, in his name:

שְׁמִנִי אֶל־לִהִים לְאֲדוֹן לְכָל מִצְרַיִם, רְדֵה אֵלַי אֶל תַּעֲמֹד.
וַיֵּשְׁבֶת בְּאֶרֶץ גֹּשֶׁן וְהָיִיתָ קְרוֹב אֵלַי...

G-d has made me master over all Egypt; come to me, do not tarry, and you will live in Goshen and be close to me... (45,9)

The Land of Goshen, also known as Raamses, as we will see below, was the cream of the crop among the cities of Egypt. It was there that the family of Yaakov resided, growing by leaps and bounds from just 70 souls into a great nation. The Torah tells us how many they were when they left Egypt 210 years later: *“Bnei Yisrael traveled from Raamses to Sukkot, some 600,000 men...”* (Sh’mot 12, 37)

Yosef was in a particularly sensitive situation, politically, and that is why the manner in which he planned the housing of his family was so amazingly impressive. He knew that any decision he made that appeared to favor his own family would not be well taken by the Egyptians. This is why Yosef, second to the king, made systematically and consistently sure that every decision connected with his family would be made not by him – but by King Pharaoh.

■ By the Word of Pharaoh

For instance, after Yosef revealed himself to his brothers and explained why they should come and live in Egypt, it could have been expected that he would inform the king. Yosef does this – but not directly. He makes sure that the news reaches Pharaoh in a roundabout manner:

וְהַקֵּל נִשְׁמַע בֵּית פַּרְעֹה לְאֹמֶר בָּאוּ אֶחָי יוֹסֵף...
*The word spread to the house of Pharaoh, saying,
Yosef’s brothers have arrived...* (B’reshit 45,16)

When Pharaoh heard the news, he invited Yosef’s brothers to remain in his country. The indirect manner in which their arrival was made known to him indicated to all that the invitation did not come from Yosef, but rather from the king himself. It was Pharaoh who proposed that the brothers settle in Egypt and receive the best that the country had to offer:

וַיֹּאמֶר פַּרְעֹה אֶל יוֹסֵף אָמַר אֶל אֶחָיִךְ זֹאת עֲשׂוּ...

וּבָאוּ אֵלַי וְאֶתְּנָה לָכֶם אֶת טוֹב אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם וְאֶכְלוּ אֶת חֶלֶב הָאָרֶץ.

Pharaoh said to Yosef, "Tell your brothers: 'This is what you must do... come to me, and I will give you the finest of Egypt, and you will eat the fat of the land.'" (verses 17-18)

Another example: Egypt was famous for having invented wagons for the transport of high-class citizens, in place of the donkeys that everyone else used. Such wagons were not generally allowed out of Egypt, to ensure the secrecy of how they were made. In this case, however, Pharaoh knew – after Yosef planted the idea in his head – that it would be difficult for the elderly Yaakov, and the women and children in his family, to journey to Egypt from the Holy Land atop donkeys. He therefore permitted, and even suggested, that Egyptian wagons be sent for this purpose. Pharaoh thus turns to Yosef and orders him to tell his brothers:

קַחוּ לָכֶם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם עֲגֻלוֹת לְטַפְּכֶם

וּלְנִשְׁיֵיכֶם וּנְשֵׁאתֶם אֶת אֲבִיכֶם וּבֹאתֶם.

Take wagons from Egypt for your children and women, and bring your father, and come. (verse 19)

When Yosef then sends the wagons, it appears to observers that he is simply fulfilling a royal command of the king, as the Torah clearly states two verses later: *"Yosef gave them wagons in accordance with Pharaoh's instructions..."* That is, those on the outside see Yosef simply following a royal command – though, in truth, it was all Yosef's doing, behind the scenes: *"To his father he sent ten donkeys carrying the finest of Egypt, and ten female donkeys carrying grain and bread..."* (verse 23)

He specifically chose the number ten – ten male donkeys, ten female donkeys – not only because of his ten brothers, but to indicate to Yaakov that his son Yosef was behind the delivery. He knew it would remind Yaakov of something: Avraham's servant Eliezer had taken ten camels when he went to bring back a wife, Rivka, for Yitzchak - Yaakov's own parents: *"The servant took ten of his master's donkeys and went with his master's finest goods"* (24,10). And just as Eliezer had brought *his master's finest* products, so too, Yosef sent his father *the finest of Egypt*.

And in the end, it was these very wagons sent by Yosef at Pharaoh's command that convinced Yaakov that what seemed like a dream – Yosef is alive! – was in fact reality:

וַיִּפֶּג לבוֹ כִּי לֹא הָאֵמִין לָהֶם... וַיֵּרָא אֶת הָעֲגָלוֹת אֲשֶׁר שָׁלַח יוֹסֵף לְשִׂאת
 אֹתוֹ וַתְּחִי רוּחַ יַעֲקֹב אֲבִיהֶם.

*[Yaakov's] heart became numb, for he did not believe them...
 [But when] he saw the wagons that Yosef had sent to carry him,
 his spirit became revived. (45,26-27)*

For Yaakov knew that such luxurious wagons, used only for the top echelons of Egyptian society, and only within Egypt's borders, could not have been sent for him without royal permission.

■ The Plan and its Execution

As soon as the brothers arrive in Egypt with their families, Yosef explains to them his entire program. He first outlines his plan for their visit to the royal palace, saying that he will tell Pharaoh the following:

אֲחֵי וּבֵית אָבִי אֲשֶׁר בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן בָּאוּ אֵלַי. וְהָאֲנָשִׁים רֹעִי צֹאן כִּי אֲנִשִּׁי מִקְנֶה
 הָיוּ וְצֹאנָם וּבְקָרָם וְכָל אֲשֶׁר לָהֶם הֵבִיאוּ.

*My brothers and father's household in Canaan have come to me.
 They are shepherds, for they were men of livestock, and they
 have brought all their flocks, cattle, and all they have. (46,31-32)*

This time, we see, Yosef wants to tell the king directly about his family's arrival; he does not want Pharaoh to learn about it from middlemen or other sources, as before. Why? Because he wants to personally inform him that he has fulfilled, down to the last letter, the royal command of placing his family in Goshen.

At the same time, Yosef also wants Pharaoh to agree that Yaakov's family should live permanently in Goshen. How can he accomplish this?

Yosef knows that the Egyptians worship the astrological sign of the ram (Aries), and that they see sheep as a holy element of their idol worship. Accordingly, shepherds who raise "sheep-gods" deserve to live and raise their sheep in a top-quality spot. The idea would come from Pharaoh, of course – but Yosef makes sure to have his brothers plant the idea in the king's mind.

He says that he will tell Pharaoh that they are not only shepherds, but that they also raise livestock – meaning that the cattle are their own. The word for "livestock" is מִקְנֶה, *mikneh*, of the same *k-n-h* root as קִנְיָן, *kinyan*, meaning "acquisition." Yosef wishes to emphasize that they are not simply shepherds

of other people's sheep, but that they also raise their own animals, and buy and sell livestock as well. Why is this so important? The fact that they own much livestock is the basis for Yosef's plan to settle them in Goshen, which will hold all the animals that arrived with them in Egypt.

Yosef then outlines the next step of his plan to his brothers: *"When Pharaoh summons you and asks what you do, tell him: 'Your servants are men of livestock, from our childhood until now, both us and our forefathers...'"* (verse 34)

He thus leads his brothers step by step, advising them exactly what to tell the king. The point he wishes them to make is that the herds in their possession have been amassed over generations, and that they know the business inside and out, having been raised on it since childhood. Yosef even thinks of the idea that his brothers might receive ministerial authority over livestock in the Royal Palace – as in fact occurred later on. (47,6)

Yosef marks his target, and has his brothers clearly understand that the objective is to settle in Goshen: *"...so that you reside in the land of Goshen, for shepherds are the abomination of Egypt"* (46,34). Why are shepherds *"the abomination of Egypt"*?

■ Usage of the Word "Abomination"

The Hebrew term *"toa'vat Mitzrayim,"* or just *"toevah,"* used three times to refer to the Egyptian gods, literally means "abomination [of Egypt]." Let us carefully study the verses, and see who actually used this term and what it really means.

For instance, let us analyze one of the arguments between Moshe Rabbeinu and Pharaoh. It happened when they were discussing the conditions under which Bnei Yisrael would be allowed to leave Egypt and bring sacrifices to G-d. After the fourth plague, that of wild animals, Pharaoh tells Moshe and Aharon: *"Go bring sacrifices to Hashem your G-d, here in [this] land"* (Sh'mot 8,21). That is, "you don't have to leave; simply bring your sacrifices here in Egypt."

Moshe, of course, does not agree, explaining that this would be impossible to implement:

לא נכון לעשות כן, כי תועבת מצרים נזבח לה' אֱלֹהֵינו.
הוּנִזְבַּח אֶת תועבת מצרים לעֲיִנֵיהֶם וְלֹא יִסְקְלֻנוּ?

"It is not right to do this, for we sacrifice to Hashem our G-d that which is abomination to Egypt. Can we sacrifice that which is an abomination to Egypt without them stoning us?" (verse 22)

Can it really be that Moshe, speaking face-to-face with the king, calls his Egyptian sheep-gods an “abomination”? Certainly not. Clearly, Moshe used the word “god” or something similar when speaking to Pharaoh, and the Torah later changed it to “abomination.”

Now that we know that it is the Torah that refers to the Egyptian gods in this way, we can now understand another use of his phrase. It occurs when Yosef sat his brothers down to eat, before he revealed his identity to them. The brothers were separated from the Egyptians, who could not eat with them because תועבה הוא למצרים, “*it is an abomination for the Egyptians.*” (B’reshit 43,32)

According our above explanation, this verse is telling us that the reason the Egyptians could not eat together with the Jews was not because the food is an abomination, nor because the Jews were abominable to them - but because the food was *holy* to the Egyptians; the Torah calls it “*abomination*” because it is worshipped as a god. The Egyptians would express this verse as follows: “We cannot eat with the Jews, because they are eating our holy gods.”

We now return to the above-quoted verse 34, which is the next time the “*abomination*” phrase is used, and we understand it as follows: Yosef tells his brothers to tell Pharaoh that they want to live in Goshen because they deal with the “*abomination of Egypt*” – that is, with what the Torah refers to as an abomination, and that which Pharaoh calls his holy sheep-gods. As we explained above, this will make Pharaoh more willing, from several standpoints, to give them the highest quality land in the country – namely, Goshen.

■ Correcting the Mistake

Precisely in accordance with the plan he has formulated, Yosef arrives personally to Pharaoh to bring him the news of his family’s arrival from the Holy Land: “*My father and brothers, and their sheep and cattle and everything they have, have arrived from Canaan, and they are here in Goshen.*” (47,1)

Yosef emphasizes two points: The first is the fact that his father and brothers own much livestock, and therefore need grazing land. Secondly, they have already arrived in Goshen as a “temporary” stopover and are waiting there right now – in accordance with Pharaoh’s suggestion that they should “*eat from the fat of the land.*” (45,18)

Yosef is hoping and assuming that since his brothers are already there, Pharaoh will not even need to make much of a decision. As long as Pharaoh remains passive, and does not order them to leave, Yosef will have achieved his goal, step by strategic step, of housing his father and brothers in the choice land of Goshen.

Then comes the decisive moment: Pharaoh summons the brothers for a meeting, just as Yosef had predicted. Pharaoh asks them what they do and how they earn a living, and the brothers were supposed to say what Yosef had instructed them: “We raise our own livestock.” But apparently, the excitement of actually meeting the king caused them to “forget their lines,” and they ended up telling him exactly the opposite: *“Your servants are shepherds, both us and our fathers.”* (47,3)

This was a great mistake. Instead of telling the king that they owned sheep and cattle, they implied that they were busy only herding the flocks of others. At this point, King Pharaoh could easily have said: “In that case, you do not need to live in Goshen. You can go anywhere else and take care of whatever flocks of sheep you find there.” However, the brothers immediately realize their mistake, and before the king can respond, they attempt to contain the damage:

וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֶל פַּרְעֹה, לָגֹר בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן כִּי אֵין מְרֻעָה לְצֹאן אֲשֶׁר לַעֲבָדֶיךָ
כִּי כָבֵד הָרָעַב בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן.

They said to Pharaoh: “We have come to live in the land, because there is no place to graze the sheep that your servants own, as the famine is heavy in the land of Canaan.” (verse 4)

The brothers emphasize that they own flocks of sheep, and do not engage only in watching the animals of others. They are thus trying to hint to the king that they need grazing land, of which there is aplenty in Goshen. But they are still not sure that the message has been understood. And so they decide to leave nothing to chance, and say straight out that which Yosef thought would be too brash: *“And so, may your servants please dwell in the land of Goshen.”* (verse 4)

How can we know that this is what happened? Because the Torah repeats וַיֹּאמְרוּ, *they said*, right in the middle of their quote; both verse 3 and verse 4 begin with these words, even though no one else said anything in between! It is therefore apparent that after their first response, there was an awkward silence in the room, at which point the brothers began speaking once

again. The final result was this: **“They said to Pharaoh, *we are shepherds... They said to Pharaoh, we’ve come to live in Goshen because there is no grazing land for the sheep we own.*”**

The meeting ends, and Pharaoh then calls Yosef and informs him of his decision: The brothers are cordially invited to settle in Goshen (verse 6). Pharaoh also adds this: **“*And if you know of any stouthearted men among them, appoint them to be ministers in charge of my livestock.*”**

The results of the meeting are much better than could have been hoped for. Not only will Yaakov’s sons live in Goshen, they can also be appointed ministers with control over the royal flocks of sheep throughout the country – a task generally reserved only for those high up in the royal hierarchy.

This part of the story ends with the successful implementation of the mission to settle Yosef’s family in Goshen (Raamses): **“*Yosef settled his father and brothers, and gave them a possession in Egypt in the finest of the land, in Raamses – as Pharaoh had commanded*”** (47,11). The Torah does not forget to emphasize yet again that which Yosef repeated often: This was not his personal decision, but rather the fulfillment of the royal decree of Pharaoh. No claims may be raised against Yosef.

Yosef, who himself was the **“*understanding and wise man*”** that he originally advised Pharaoh to appoint, has completed his role in preparing the ideal platform for the growth and development, both natural and non-natural, of his father’s family into a veritable nation. Thus, thanks to Yosef’s planning, the *Brit Bein HaBetarim* decree of exile to a strange land starts off for the descendants of Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov from the best possible starting point.

