

SHABBAT SHALOM. Today is 23 Kislev 5786, corresponding to December 13, 2025.

TORAH DIALOGUE  
(p. 141 Hz) (p. 229 S) (p. 162 Hi) (p. 198 AS)

VAYEISHEV וַיֵּשֶׁב

Genesis 37:1

Compiled by Rabbi Edward Davis (RED)

1. We can contrast the “These are the genealogies of Esav” (36:1) and “These are the genealogies of Yaakov” (37:2). We see that the development of the nation of Esav has already grown with a king to unite the different families. Yaakov’s family has not grown much beyond a tribal stage and is tormented by the strife and disharmony that the brothers are experiencing. The Jewish family is years away from developing a kingdom. Esav will have a series of at least eight kings before Israel will have one: Moshe. It would seem that the Jewish tribe will need to experience the harsh slavery of Egypt, a “crucible of affliction” before it realizes the need to be united enough to reach the status of being a nation. (RED)

2. The Torah immediately tells us that all the brothers hate and are jealous of Yosef, even the sons of the handmaidens. They must have felt that Yaakov favoring Yosef is a true problem for them. Just as Avraham had chosen Yitzchak as his successor in leading the family, and rejected Yishmael and Keturah’s sons, so could Yaakov choose Yosef and exclude the other sons in the leadership role in the family. This makes the much younger son as a true rival to all of them. Really, they should hate Yaakov, but they will outlive their father and his prejudice against them. But they will have to endure Yosef for a lifetime. And Yosef was quite immature as a seventeen year old. Speaking La-shon HaRa was wrong. And why did Yosef tell his brothers about these dreams. Yosef must have thought himself as a prophet and interpreted his dreams as divine prophecy and therefore was compelled to share these visions with everyone.

3. The brothers took the sheep and cattle for pasture in the Shechem area. The family residence was in Chevron. Chevron was at least 50 MILES from Shechem, as the birds fly. Why were they pasturing their animals so far from home? Several thoughts come to mind. Yaakov had purchased land in the Shechem area, so he was entitled to use that land for his animals. But still, that is 50 miles away. Furthermore the neighboring tribes certainly remember these Jews, who murdered all the residents of Shechem. Yaakov would be endangering his family and his wealth by choosing that area to graze his animals and to jeopardize his dear family. The only logical answer is that

Hashem was orchestrating the whole narrative for obvious reasons. (RED)

4. The brothers justified their doing away with Yosef. When they saw Yosef approaching them, they said: here comes the dreamer. (37:19). It was the dreams that angered them the most, not the colorful tunic. The thought that Yosef felt that he was destined to rule over them really burned inside of them. Yaakov did not feel bad about giving Yosef the tunic, but he did feel bad that Yosef told his brothers about these dreams. And yet, Yaakov sent his hated younger son to check on the rest of the family who hated him. A truly unwise move on Yaakov’s part. It had to be Hashem’s plan! (RED)

5. After their throwing Yosef in the pit, they sat and enjoyed a good meal. (37:25). They obviously had no regrets about getting rid of Yosef. The Chizkuni (Chezkiyah ben Mano’ach, a thirteenth-century French scholar) wrote that it is possible that the brothers had no knowledge of the sale of Yosef into slavery. Even though they planned to sell him, a Midianite caravan came and drew Yosef out of the pit and sold him to Yishmaelites, who took him to Egypt and sold him there. Many interpretations abound in trying to understand exactly what happened to Yosef. Nevertheless, when Yosef revealed himself to his brothers years later in Egypt, he states emphatically that I am your brother, whom you sold to Egypt. (45:4). All of Jewish literature will concur with Yosef’s statement. The brothers were at fault, no matter how you interpret these verses. (RED)

6. In the later narrative about Yehudah’s family (chapter 38), our Sages tell us that two of Yehudah’s sons died because Yehudah did not save Yosef entirely (Sotah 13). The narrative is purposefully missing full identification. Yehudah’s first wife is called Shua’s daughter; her name is never mentioned. And wife number two is Tamar with no mention of who her father is. Strange. Rashi quotes a Midrash that identifies Tamar’s father as Shem, the son of Noach. That could be because what she did in this story would not bring honor to her father’s name. Another question arises when we compare the two stories of Yehudah’s attraction to a woman and Yosef’s being tempted by Mrs. Potiphar. The comparison clearly favors Yosef, who did not succumb to temptation.

7. In the last story of the Chief Butler and the Chief Baker, Rabbi Frand points out an interesting item. When these two prisoners had their dream, they were sorely depressed. And then Yosef approached them and asked them: Why do you appear downcast today? Had not Yosef asked them this question, the rest of the story never would have occurred. Rabbi Frand

emphasizes that the question opened the door to discuss the matter. Showing an interest in another person's plight showed that Yosef cared about them. That attitude enabled them to seek Yosef's help. And brought about Yosef securing his freedom and ultimate promotion. Yosef brought about his own good tidings...just by showing an interest in another person's welfare.

8. Midrash. Bereishit Rabbah, chapter 84. Reuven heard and he rescued Yosef from their hand. (37:21). Reuven said "I am the firstborn, and only I am to blame for this crime." Reuven had all the reason to hate Yosef, for Yosef was going to receive the privilege of what belongs to the firstborn, the double portion and the kingship. But Reuven felt that he had to act even if it meant that he was saving his arch rival.

#### QUESTIONS FOR PARSHAT VAYEISHEV 5786

##### I. From the Text

1. What gift did Yaakov give Yosef showing him that Yosef is the favorite son? (37:3)
2. What were Yosef's two dreams? (37:7-9)
3. Whose idea was it to throw Yosef into the pit instead of killing him? (37:22)
4. For how many years did Yosef live as a "slave"? (37:22 and 41:46)
5. What did Yosef tell the Chief Butler and Chief Baker that would happen to them? (40:13...)

##### II. From Rashi

6. What three things did Yosef speak Lashon HaRa against the sons of Leah? (37:2)
7. What was Yaakov's response to Yosef's dreams? (37:11)
8. For how long did Yaakov mourn the "death" of Yosef? (37:34)
9. Who was Tamar's father? (38:24)
10. What were the sins of the Chief Butler and the Chief Baker? (40:1)

##### III. From the Rabbis

11. What did the special tunic represent? (Seforno)
12. When the Torah speaks of Yaakov's love for Yosef, it refers to Yaakov as Yisrael. Why? (Rabbeinu Bachya)
13. How did the brothers justify in their minds that they should kill Yosef? (Seforno)

##### IV. Midrash

14. Did Potiphar really believe his wife's charges against Yosef?

##### V. Haftarah

15. What sin did Hashem not forgive Israel the nation?

##### VI. Relationships

16.
  - a) Esav - Yehudit
  - b) Dan - Chushim
  - c) Menasheh - Chuppim
  - d) Aharon - Aminadav
  - e) Tzipporah - Chur

#### ANSWERS FOR PARSHAT VAYEISHEV 5786

1. A fine multicolored tunic.
2. 1) The brothers were in the field binding sheaves, and the brothers' sheaves bowed down to Yosef's. 2) The sun, moon, and 11 stars bowed down to Yosef.
3. Reuven
4. About 13 years.
5. Pharaoh will restore the Chief Butler to his royal position. And Pharaoh will have the Chief Baker executed.
6. That the brothers ate a limb from a living animal. That they mistreated the sons of the handmaids. And Yosef accused the brothers of immorality.
7. He anticipated and looked forward to the dreams becoming reality.
8. For 22 years.
9. Shem, Noach's son.
10. Chief Butler: a fly was found in Pharaoh's wine cup.  
Chief Baker: a pebble was discovered in Pharaoh's bread.
11. A mark of leadership.
12. To demonstrate that this was due to a higher spiritual notion.
13. They figured that Yosef was coming to Shechem to find fault with them and then report it to their father, who would then curse them.
14. No, he did not. But he has to honor her complaint lest the people would believe that she was always unfaithful to him.
15. For the sin of persecuting the poor.
16.
  - a) Husband-Wife
  - b) Father Dan
  - c) First Cousins
  - d) Father-in-law Aminadav
  - e) Aunt Tzipporah