

- (ה) וַיְחַלְמֵם יוֹסֵף חֲלוֹם וַיַּגִּד לְאָחָיו וַיּוֹסְפוּ עוֹד שְׂנֵא אֹתוֹ.
- (ו) וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵיהֶם שְׂמְעוּ-נָא הַחֲלוֹם הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר חָלַמְתִּי.
- (ז) וְהִנֵּה אֲנִי חֹנֵן מֵאֲלֹמִים אֲלֹמִים בְּתוֹךְ הַשָּׂדֶה וְהִנֵּה קָמָה אֶלְמָתִי וְגַם-נִצְבָּה וְהִנֵּה תִסְבֶּינָה אֶלְמֹתֵיכֶם וַתִּשְׁתַּחֲוֶי-וּ לְאֶלְמָתִי.
- (ח) וַיֹּאמְרוּ לוֹ אָחָיו הַמֶּלֶךְ תִּמְלֹךְ עָלֵינוּ אִם-מְשׁוֹל תִּמְשַׁל בְּנוֹ וַיּוֹסְפוּ עוֹד שְׂנֵא אֹתוֹ עַל-חֲלֹמְתוֹ וְעַל-דִּבְרָיו.
- (ט) וַיְחַלְמֵם עוֹד חֲלוֹם אַחֵר וַיְסַפֵּר אֹתוֹ לְאָחָיו וַיֹּאמֶר הִנֵּה חֲלֹמְתִי חֲלוֹם עוֹד וְהִנֵּה הַשָּׁמֶשׁ וְהַיָּרֵחַ וְאַחַד עֶשֶׂר כּוֹכָבִים מִשְׁתַּחֲוִים לִי.
- (י) וַיְסַפֵּר אֶל-אָבִיו וְאֶל-אָחָיו וַיַּגִּיעַ-בּוֹ אָבִיו וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ מָה הַחֲלוֹם הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר חָלַמְתָּ הַבּוֹא נְבוֹא אֲנִי וְאִמִּי וְאָחִיךָ לְהִשְׁתַּחֲוֹת לְךָ אַרְצָה.
- (יא) וַיִּקְנֹאוּ-בּוֹ אָחָיו וְאָבִיו שָׁמַר אֶת-הַדָּבָר.

THE MEANING OF YOSEF'S DREAMS

Consider the following questions:

1. Why does verse 5 say only, *they hated him even more*, and not add “because of his dreams,” as it does in verse 8?
2. Almost all of verse 6 seems redundant. The Torah should have simply stated: *He said, “Now we were gathering...”*
3. In verse 7 it states, *“My bundle stood up and it also remained established...”* What does the second half of this statement add to the first?
4. Why do the brothers mention two separate expressions of rulership (verse 8), *“Will you come to be a king over us?! Will you rule over us?!”* Also, are they genuine questions, or are they expressions of astonishment?

5. Why does it say (verse 8), *They hated him even more because of his dreams and because of his words*? Aren't they one and the same thing? Also, why does it say "dreams," in the plural? So far he had only told them about one dream.
6. (a) Why does it say (verse 9), *He dreamed another dream again*? It would have been sufficient to say either, "He dreamed a dream again (וַיִּחְלֶם עוֹד חֲלוֹם)" or "He dreamed another dream (וַיִּחְלֶם חֲלוֹם אַחֵר)." (b) When Yosef actually speaks to the brothers, why does he say only, "I dreamed a dream again (עוֹד)," without the word "another" (אַחֵר)?
7. With regard to the second dream, the Torah first states that *he told it (only) to his brothers* (verse 9), but then says, *He told his father and his brothers* (verse 10). Why is this?
8. Why does the Torah tell us after the dreams (verse 11) that, *His brothers were jealous of him*? Why doesn't it say, "They hated him even more," as it did in verses 5 and 8? Furthermore, why did the brothers not respond verbally to Yosef's second dream as they had to the first?
9. What does it mean that Yaakov *kept the matter in his heart*?

The brothers were upset by three aspects of Yosef's recounting of his dreams to them:

- (1) The very fact that he told them his dreams when he knew (verse 4) that *they hated him; they could not speak with him in a peaceful way*. This is all the more striking when we consider that a person normally only tells his dreams to a good friend. By telling them his dreams, he was showing that he didn't care about the fact they hated him, and he was forcing them, as it were, to speak with him. All this was bound to stir up their enmity even more.

- (2) The content of the dreams. The symbolism of the dreams clearly indicated that he would rule over them. This was also bound to increase their hatred and jealousy.
- (3) The style of speech he used in telling them his dreams.

To explain: In reference to the first aspect, the Torah says (verse 5), *Yosef dreamed a dream, and he told his brothers, and they hated him even more*. At this point, Yosef had not yet told them the content of his dream, only that he'd had one. [The Torah therefore does not say that they hated him “because of his dreams,” as it says in verse 8. Rather,] the mere fact that *Yosef dreamed a dream and he told his brothers* instead of being quiet inevitably caused them to *hate him even more*, regardless of the dream's contents. [This answers Question 1.]

Answer to
Question 1

Regarding the second and third aspects, Yosef didn't just recount the dream. Rather, he prefaced it with the words, “*Come and listen to this dream that I dreamed!*” It was as if he was boasting: Stand here and hear about my greatness that I dreamed about! [This answers Question 2.] Then he upset them again with the actual content of the dream — that their bundles of wheat bowed down to his. After this, the Torah tells us (verse 8), *They hated him “because of his dreams,”* i.e., because of the content of his dreams, that revealed that he lay on his bed at night thinking about lording it over them. And they also hated him “*because of his words,*” i.e., because of the style of speech that he used, appearing to elevate himself and rejoice about what his dreams portended. [This answers the first part of Question 5.]

Answer to
Question 2

Answer to
First Part of
Question 5

Yosef told them his first dream, stating, “*then my bundle stood up and it also remained established (וַנִּצְבָּה)*.” The brothers took this to mean that Yosef would first rule over them in the manner of a military official or some other type of officer (a “standing up,” or “rising,” of sorts), and that afterwards he would become an actual king over them (as we find the word נִצְבָּב referring to kingship in *Melachim I* 22:48, which states: וּמִלְכָּה אֵין בְּאֲדוֹם

(נִצָּב מֶלֶךְ). [This answers Question 3 according to the brothers' understanding.]²⁵

The brothers concluded that if Yosef's dream truly came from God, there would be no point in hating him. Perhaps there would be room for jealousy over his exalted position, but no more than that. However, they were convinced that the dream was just a product of Yosef's fertile imagination and was entirely meaningless. They therefore responded by expressing astonishment, ridiculing both parts of Yosef's dream: "Will you come to be a king over us?! Will you rule over us?!" By this they meant, "Just as the second, higher level (kingship) will never come about, for no one is considered a king by reigning over just ten people,²⁶ so too the first level, that of "ruling," will not come about, either.²⁷ It is clear that your whole dream is just a creation of your imagination and does not come from God!" [This answers Question 4.]

The verse says *they hated him even more because of his "dreams"* (in the plural — even though he had thus far told them about only one dream), because they were sure that this night dream was the product of daydreams of grandeur and rulership that Yosef had while he was awake. [This answers the second part of Question 5.]

However, the brothers' interpretation of Yosef's dream was incorrect. As future events would reveal, the dream's true meaning was as follows: As we know, during the seven years of plenty Yosef gathered grain — as did the other Egyptians and the inhabitants of the land of Canaan, including the brothers.²⁸ This is the meaning of Yosef dreaming (verse 7) that *we were gathering bundles of wheat in the field.*²⁹ Yosef continued: "But only

25. However, see further for what Yosef's dream really meant.

26. I.e., the ten brothers (not counting Binyamin).

27. The Alshich adds that it did not occur to them that he would be a king over the Egyptians.

28. Compare Rashi, *Bereishis* 41:55, from *Bereishis Rabbah* 91:5.

29. The Alshich points out that support for connecting Yosef's statement to the

my bundle of grain *stood up*, i.e., grew to be heavy and strong; and my grain *also remained established*, i.e., lasted a long time without rotting” — unlike the grain of the brothers and of everyone else. [This completes the answers to Question 3.] Yosef concluded: “Your bundles... bowed down to my bundle,” symbolizing that the brothers would be forced to come down to Egypt and bow before Yosef in order to get food [because their bundles of wheat had rotted, while Yosef’s had not].³⁰

Completion
of Answer to
Question 3

After the first dream predicted their forced descent to Egypt to purchase Yosef’s wheat, the second dream about the sun, moon, and stars described the conclusion of this process — that they would humble themselves before Yosef, and refer to themselves and to their father Yaakov as his servants.³¹

Based on this, we can answer why it says in verse 9, *He dreamed another dream again* (Question 6). The word *again* indicates that the second dream was a continuation and addition to the first dream.³² But in another sense, the second dream was *another* dream, i.e., different from the first: the first one was principally about them coming to purchase wheat, while the second dream was principally about their humbling themselves before him. [This answers Question 6a.]

Answer to
Question 6a

collection of grain during the years of plenty may be found in *Bereishis* 41:18, which states: *Yosef gathered all the food of the seven years... the food of the field around the city he placed inside it.*

30. The Alshich adds that this may also explain the seemingly strange wording of the verse, “Then your bundles ‘made a circle (תִּסְבְּיָה) and they bowed down to my bundle’). The word תִּסְבְּיָה may be understood as related to the word סוּבֵין, which is the rough bran that grows around the wheat kernel. The verse is accordingly saying that the brothers’ bundles rotted and all that remained was the bran. [Another possible understanding of the Alshich is that the brothers’ wheat rotted to such an extent that what was left was of extremely inferior quality; see *Bava Kamma* 7a, where סוּבֵין is used as a metaphor for a very inferior commodity.]

31. See, respectively, *Bereishis* 42:10 and 44:31.

32. That is, after being forced to come down to Egypt to purchase grain, Yosef’s family would have to come and bow before him.

Chapter
37

(12) The brothers went to shepherd their father's sheep in Shechem.

(13) Yisrael said to Yosef, "Are your brothers not shepherding in Shechem? Go and I will send you to them." [Yosef] said to him, "I am ready."

(14) [Yaakov] said to him, "Please go and see how your brothers are and how the sheep are and bring me back a report." He sent him from the valley of Chevron and he approached Shechem.

(15) A man found him, and behold, he was lost in the field. The man asked him saying, "What are you looking for?"

But the brothers did not know all this. As explained, they understood his first dream to be merely a natural outgrowth of what he was dreaming about by day — and therefore meaningless. To prove them wrong, Yosef told them about his second dream, which he introduced specifically with the words, "*Now I have dreamed a dream **again**.*" Yosef was saying: This second dream continues and explains my previous dream. This time I dreamed that the sun and moon were bowing down to me. Would I ever have daydreams of my father and mother bowing down to me (that would cause me to have such a dream at night)?! This proves that both this dream and the previous one are not mere products of my own thoughts or aspirations but rather are true dreams from heaven." [This answers Question 6b.]

Answer to
Question 6b

When the brothers heard this, they were saddened. It was clearly true: Yosef could never have entertained such thoughts about ruling over his parents. Evidently, heaven was sending a message that Yosef was destined to rule over them. There was thus no room for hatred — only for jealousy, over the fact that heaven was planning to raise Yosef above them. And because the brothers [were convinced by Yosef's second dream and] were troubled by it, they were silent and did not answer him as they had after hearing the first one. [This answers Question 8.]

Answer to
Question 8

(יב) וַיֵּלְכוּ אַחֲיוֹ לְרַעוֹת אֶת־צֹאן אֲבֵיהֶם בְּשֹׁכֶם.
 (יג) וַיֹּאמֶר יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶל־יוֹסֵף הֲלוֹא אַחִיךָ רַעִים בְּשֹׁכֶם לָכֵה וְאַשְׁלַחְךָ
 אֲלֵיהֶם וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ הֲנִנִּי.
 (יד) וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ לֶךְ־נָא רְאֵה אֶת־שְׁלוֹם אַחִיךָ וְאֶת־שְׁלוֹם הַצֹּאן וְהַשְּׂבִי
 דָּבַר וַיִּשְׁלַחְהוּ מֵעֵמֶק חֲבֵרוֹן וַיָּבֹא שְׂכָמָה.
 (טו) וַיִּמְצְאוּהוּ אִישׁ וְהִנֵּה תַעֲהָ בְשֻׁדָּה וַיִּשְׁאַלְהוּ הָאִישׁ לֵאמֹר מַה־
 תִּבְקֶשׁ.

Answer to
Question 7

Yosef then proceeded to recount his dream to his father in the presence of the brothers, hoping that Yaakov would also substantiate the veracity of his dreams. [This answers Question 7.] But Yaakov wanted to deflect the brothers' jealousy. He therefore tried to show that the dreams were indeed meaningless: "Will I and your mother and your brothers (represented by the sun, moon, and stars) come to bow down to the ground before you?! How could this be, when Yosef's mother (Rachel) was no longer alive?!"³³

Yaakov was not successful. His sons still believed that the dream was from God — either because they realized that the moon in the dream represented not Rachel but Bilhah,³⁴ or because they understood that every dream contains elements that are inaccurate. [Yosef's] brothers were therefore jealous of him. As to Yaakov, he too understood that the dream referred to Bilhah. But he kept the matter in his heart; he kept this fact hidden, hoping that this would succeed in removing the brothers' jealousy. [This answers Question 9.]

Answer to
Question 9

33. Compare *Bereishis Rabbah* 84:11. The Midrash says that Yaakov did not realize that the "mother" in the dream was Bilhah. But Alshich goes on to say that Yaakov did know this.

34. Who had helped raise Yosef (*Yefeh To'ar* ad loc.).

(16) He said, “I am looking for my brothers. Please tell me where they are shepherding.”

(17) The man said, “They have moved away from this because I heard them saying, ‘Let us go to Dosan (דֹּסָן).’” Yosef went after his brothers and he found them in Dosan.

WHY YAAKOV SENDS YOSEF TO SEE THE BROTHERS IN SHECHEM

Before we begin our discussion of the difficulties in this passage, we must first understand that according to the Midrash,³⁵ the three mentions of the word *איש*, *man*, in verses 15 and 17 are a reference to three angels.³⁶ In addition, we must know that the third angel’s statement in verse 17, *גָּסְעוּ מִזֶּה*, *They (the brothers) have moved away from this*, is to be understood: “They have moved away from considering you their brother.”³⁷

The difficulties are as follows:

(A) It is very hard to understand God’s intention in sending the three angels to Yosef. If He wanted Yosef to meet up with his brothers, why did He instruct the third angel to warn him that they no longer considered him their brother? On the other hand, if He did not want Yosef to join his brothers, why didn’t He command the angels to tell him explicitly to turn back and return in safety to his father?

35. See *Bereishis Rabbah* 84:14.

36. The Alshich adds that if there had been just one regular man who spoke to Yosef three times, there would be no reason for the whole dialogue that is recorded in the Torah. The man would just have told Yosef that he could find his brothers in Dosan.

The Alshich identifies the first angel as Gavriel (see *Midrash Tanchuma, Vayeishev* 2, cited by Rashi on verse 15), and the other two as Micha’el and Refa’el.

37. The *gematria* of the word *זֶה* (*this*) is twelve. The Alshich thus explains the verse to mean that the brothers broke away from the idea that they were twelve brothers. [See similarly Rashi with *Sifsei Chachamim*.]