

- (23) The chief butler did not remember Yosef and he forgot about him.¹
 (1) It was at the end of two years of days. Pharaoh is dreaming that behold! — he is standing over the river.

YOSEF'S TWO EXTRA YEARS IN PRISON

Consider the following questions:

1. Pharaoh's dreams, which led to Yosef's being freed from jail,² took place *two years* after Yosef had asked the chief butler to get him freed from prison. We learned at the end of *Parashas Vayeishev*³ that according to the Sages, those two years were two **extra** years that Yosef had to spend in prison because, in speaking to the butler, he had given the impression that he was relying on the man (and not on God) to be released. But how did our Sages know that Yosef was due to be freed when he spoke to the butler, and that the two years that passed since then were an added punishment?
2. Why does the verse say, וַיְהִי מִקֵּץ שְׁנָתַיִם, *It was at the end of two years*, instead of using the more common expression, וַיְהִי אַחֲרַיִם שְׁנָתַיִם, *It was after two years*? And why does it add שְׁנָתַיִם יָמִים, which literally means *two years "of days"*? The word יָמִים seems completely redundant.
3. Why does it say, וּפְרָעֹה הִלָּם, which literally means *Pharaoh "is dreaming"* (i.e., in the present tense)?

Our Sages knew that Yosef had to be imprisoned for ten years, as an atonement for the ten drops of seed that had emerged from his between fingertips before he managed to tear himself away

1. Note that this verse is the last one in *Parashas Vayeishev*.
 2. See below, 41:9ff.
 3. See Alshich above, 40:13–15, 23.

(כג) וְלֹא־זָכַר שְׂרֵה־הַמְּשֻׁקִּים אֶת־יוֹסֵף וַיִּשְׁכַּחֵהוּ.
(א) וַיְהִי מִקֶּץ שְׁנַתִּים יָמִים וּפְרָעָה חָלַם וְהָיָה עֹמֵד עַל־הַיָּאֵר.

from the advances of Potiphar’s wife.⁴ They calculated that when Yosef asked the chief butler to get him out of jail, he had already been in prison for ten years: He was seventeen when he was kidnaped from his father’s house, he spent one year in Potiphar’s house, and when he came before Pharaoh he was thirty years old. It follows that he spent twelve years in prison, and it is clear from our passage that the last two years were after he spoke to the butler. [This answers Question 1.]

Answer to
Question 1

But there is another way to answer Question 1, one that is directly related to our other questions as well: The Sages knew that Yosef’s last two years in prison were an extra punishment from the Torah’s language in our passage. Verse 1 states, *It was at the end of two years of days ... Pharaoh is dreaming*. The seemingly redundant phrase “two years *of days*” indicates that God caused Pharaoh to have the dreams that would get Yosef released exactly two years **to the day** after he had spoken to the chief butler — not a day sooner and not a day later. [This answers the second part of Question 2.] In addition, the Torah’s use of the present tense in the phrase “*Pharaoh is dreaming*” brings out the point that Pharaoh began dreaming only **now**, after the two years were up. [This answers Question 3.] From the exact timing of the Divine *hashgachah* (Providence) it was clear to our Sages that this two-year delay in Yosef’s attaining his freedom was a precisely calibrated additional punishment, separate from the ten years that preceded them. [This is another answer to Question 1.]

Answer to
Second Part
of Question 2

Answer to
Question 3

Another
Answer to
Question 1

We may now learn an important lesson from our passage. By placing together the last verse of the previous *parashah* (*The chief*

4. See Alshich above, *Parashas Vayeishev* 39:20–23, with footnote 181.

(1) It was at the end of two years of days. Pharaoh is dreaming that behold! — he is standing over the river.⁷

(17) Pharaoh told Yosef, “In my dream, I am standing by the side of the river.

(2) From the river are emerging seven beautiful-looking cows with healthy flesh. They grazed in the marshland.

(18) From the river are emerging seven cows with healthy flesh and a beautiful form. They grazed in the marshland.

(3) Seven other cows are coming out after them from the river — ugly-looking and thin. They stood next to the [healthy] cows on the river bank.

(19) Seven other cows are coming out after them — poor, with a very ugly form and thin. I have never seen such terrible-looking cows in the whole of Egypt.

(4) The ugly-looking, thin cows ate the seven beautiful-looking and healthy cows. Pharaoh woke up!

(20) The thin ugly cows ate the first seven healthy cows.

(21) They came inside them, but it was not noticeable that they had come inside them. Their appearance was as bad as it was before, and I woke up.

of drinks did not remember Yosef and he forgot about him) and the beginning of our *parashah* (*It was at the end of two years of days, Pharaoh is dreaming*), the Torah is coming to teach us that a person should not think that his own efforts, or his connections with people who like him, are what get him out of difficulties. One should not think that if Yosef had not made an effort to ask the chief butler, who liked Yosef,⁵ to speak to Pharaoh about freeing him (which the butler eventually did⁶), Yosef would have remained in prison for his whole life. To the contrary: salvation

5. This is because Yosef had interpreted his dream in the prison and told him he would be going free (see 40:12–13).

6. In 41:9–13, when he told Pharaoh that there was a slave in prison who could interpret Pharaoh’s dreams.

- (א) וַיְהִי מִקֵּץ שְׁנָתַיִם יָמִים וּפְרָעָה חָלַם וְהָיָה עֹמֵד עַל־הַיָּאָר.
(ז) וַיְדַבֵּר פְּרָעָה אֶל־יוֹסֵף בְּחֻלְמֵי הַנְּגִי עֹמֵד עַל־שֵׁפֶת הַיָּאָר.
- (ב) וְהָיָה מִן־הַיָּאָר עֶלְת שֶׁבַע פָּרוֹת יָפוֹת מְרֹאָה וּבְרִיאַת בָּשָׂר וּתְרַעֲיָנָה בְּאָחוּ.
(ח) וְהָיָה מִן־הַיָּאָר עֶלְת שֶׁבַע פָּרוֹת בְּרִיאֹת בָּשָׂר וַיִּפֹּת תֹּאֵר וּתְרַעֲיָנָה בְּאָחוּ.
- (ג) וְהָיָה שֶׁבַע פָּרוֹת אַחְרוֹת עֶלְוֹת אַחְרֵיהֶן מִן־הַיָּאָר רְעוֹת מְרֹאָה וְדָקוֹת בָּשָׂר וּתְעַמְדָּנָה אֶצֶל הַפָּרוֹת עַל־שֵׁפֶת הַיָּאָר.
(ט) וְהָיָה שֶׁבַע פָּרוֹת אַחְרוֹת עֶלְוֹת אַחְרֵיהֶן דְּלוֹת וְרְעוֹת תֹּאֵר מְאֹד וְרָקוֹת בָּשָׂר לֹא־רִאִיתִי כְהֵנָּה בְּכָל־אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם לְרַע.
- (ד) וַתֹּאכְלָנָה הַפָּרוֹת רְעוֹת הַמְרֹאָה וְדָקוֹת הַבָּשָׂר אֶת שֶׁבַע הַפָּרוֹת יִפֹּת הַמְרֹאָה וְהַבְּרִיאַת וַיִּיקֶץ פְּרָעָה.
(כ) וַתֹּאכְלָנָה הַפָּרוֹת הַרְקוֹת וְהַרְעוֹת אֶת שֶׁבַע הַפָּרוֹת הַרְאֲשׁוֹנוֹת הַבְּרִיאַת.
- (כא) וַתִּבְאֵנָה אֶל־קַרְבְּנָה וְלֹא נֹדַע כִּי־בָאוּ אֶל־קַרְבְּנָה וּמְרִאֵיהֶן רַע כַּאֲשֶׁר בְּתַחֲלָה וַאֲיָקֶץ.

comes from God, to those who trust in Him. The Torah's statement that *at the end of two years ... Pharaoh is dreaming*, teaches that it was because Yosef improperly relied on the butler that God arranged for Pharaoh to have the dreams that led to Yosef's freedom only after those two years, and not when the ten previous years had concluded.⁷ [This answers the first part of Question 2.]

Answer to
First Part of
Question 2

7. We have juxtaposed the Torah's account of the dreams (verses 1-8) with Pharaoh's recounting of the dreams to Yosef (verses 17-24) in order to make it easier to understand the Alshich's discussion of our passage. To make it clear to the reader which version of the dreams are being discussed, we will refer to the Torah's original recording of the dreams as "the first version" and Pharaoh's account to Yosef as "the second version."