

YOSEF'S TWO EXTRA YEARS IN PRISON

Chapter 40–41

- 23)** *The chief butler did not remember Yosef and he forgot about him.*

(כג) וְלֹא זָכַר שֶׁר הַמִּשְׁקִים אֶת יוֹסֵף וַיִּשְ�כַּחְהוּ.
- 1)** *It was at the end of two years of days: Pharaoh is dreaming that behold! — he is standing over the river.*

(ד) וַיְהִי מִקֵּץ שְׁנַתִּים יָמִים וּפָרְעָה חֹלֵם וְהִנֵּה עֹמֵד עַל הַיָּאָר.

Consider the following questions:

- Pharaoh’s dreams, which led to Yosef’s being freed from jail, took place *two years* after the Yosef had asked the chief butler to get him freed from prison. According to the Sages, those two years were extra ones that Yosef had to spend in prison because, in speaking to the butler (at the end of the last *parashah*), 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 the butler forgot him were then an added punishment?
- Why does our first verse in *Parashas Mikeitz* say וַיְהִי מִקֵּץ שְׁנַתִּים, *It was at the end of two years*, instead of using the more common expression וַיְהִי אַחֵר שְׁנַתִּים, *It was after two years*? And why does it add שְׁנַתִּים יָמִים, which literally means *two years “of days”*? The word יָמִים seems completely redundant.
- Why does it say, וּפָרְעָה חֹלֵם, which literally means *Pharaoh “is dreaming”* (i.e., in the present tense)?

Yosef spent thirteen years in Egypt before becoming viceroy, as he was 17 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 the Torah’s language in our passage that Yosef’s last two years in prison were an extra punishment. Verse 1 states, *It was at the end of two years of days...* The seemingly redundant phrase “*two years of days*” indicates that God caused Pharaoh to have the dreams that would get Yosef released exactly *at the end* of two years **to the day** after he had asked for the chief butler’s help — not a day

sooner and not a day later. **[This answers Question 2.]**

In addition, the Torah's use of the present tense in the next 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 answers Question 1.]**

We may now learn an important lesson from our passage. By placing together the last verse of the previous *parashah* (*The chief butler 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 him (as Yosef had interpreted his dream correctly), to speak to Pharaoh about freeing him (which the butler eventually did, as recounted in verses 9–13 below), Yosef would have remained in prison for his whole life.

To the contrary: salvation 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.

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