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פרשת וישב תשפ״ז

From the House of יעקב to יוסף הצדיק

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The Problem of the כתונת

The story of יוסף and his brothers is among the most difficult narratives in ספר בראשית. The destruction of אחוה (*brotherhood*), the sale of יוסף, and the anguish of יעקב would eventually become the very circumstances through which the בית of יעקב would survive. The brothers attempted to prevent יוסף's dreams from being fulfilled, yet their actions ultimately brought about their fulfillment. But before examining the conduct of the brothers, we must ask a more fundamental question. How did this conflict begin?

The תורה tells us:

> וְיִשְׂרָאֵל אָהַב אֶת יוֹסֵף מִכָּל בָּנָיו כִּי בֶן זְקֻנִים הוּא לוֹ וְעָשָׂה לוֹ כְּתֹנֶת פַּסִּים. (בראשית לז:ג)
>
> *And Israel loved Yosef more than all his sons, for he was a son of his old age; and he made him a special tunic.*
>
> וַיִּרְאוּ אֶחָיו כִּי אֹתוֹ אָהַב אֲבִיהֶם מִכָּל אֶחָיו וַיִּשְׂנְאוּ אֹתוֹ וְלֹא יָכְלוּ דַּבְּרוֹ לְשָׁלֹם. (בראשית לז:ד)
>
> *His brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, and they hated him and could not speak to him peacefully.*[1]

יעקב loved יוסף more than his other sons and made him a special כתונת. This is extraordinarily troubling. Did יעקב not understand the danger of favoritism? He had experienced the consequences of divided affection within his own challenges with עשו. He knew the differences between the שבטים and the difficulty of bringing twelve distinct personalities into one household. The רמב״ן explains that יעקב passed on to יוסף the חכמות ותתרי תורה, and found him משכיל ובעל סוד, capable of understanding them.[2] But does יעקב love יוסף more because he taught him these סודות, or did he entrust them to יוסף because he recognized that יוסף could understand them? This, too, sharpens the question of his special position within the בית. What would יוסף look like outside of his home and environment? Will his Torah flourish or fumble?

Moreover, חז״ל explicitly derive a warning from his conduct. The גמרא in שבת teaches that a person should never distinguish one child from the others, and traces the brothers' קנאה over the כתונת to the eventual descent of our ancestors into מצרים. I am of the opinion that the אבות or שבטים were not perfect people, and clearly we see that חז״ל found a lesson to learn from יעקב's actions. But to think that such an individual would have been so out of tune with their children and how this might affect them, it's hard to hear.[3]

Why would יעקב do precisely what חז״ל teach us not to do?

There may be another dimension to the כתונת that makes this question even stronger. ראובן was the natural בכור of יעקב. So long as the בכורה (*firstborn right*) belonged to the eldest son by birth, the arrangement was predetermined. There was no question about which brother would receive it. But the

episode involving בלהה altered that natural order. Although חז״ל explain that ראובן did not physically commit the act described by the plain reading of the פסוק, his interference with his father's bed carried grave consequences.[4] דברי הימים explicitly states that his בכורה was given to בני יוסף, while leadership would ultimately emerge from יהודה and his descendants.[5]

Once the original בכור loses his standing, the question of succession becomes fundamentally different. If the firstborn will no longer automatically carry the privileges of בכורה, which of the brothers will receive them? Perhaps the כתונת was not merely an expression of יעקב's special affection. It may have been the outward indication that יוסף had been selected for a position previously associated with the בכור. This possibility is especially interesting because the כתונת is also the name of a garment among בגדי כהונה. The כלי יקר connects יוסף's special clothing to the transfer of בכורה and the ancient relationship between the firstborn and the עבודה.[6]

They may have believed that the order of the entire בית had been changed. The question now becomes sharper. Why would יעקב publicly designate יוסף in a way that could only intensify the existing competition? And why, if the כתונת represented such a transfer, is the בכורה narrated only at יעקב's deathbed, while the garment was given now? This is unlike עשו selling his בכורה to יעקב, which the תורה narrates as it happens.[7]

What are we to make of the fact that this same כתונת, which appeared to designate יוסף, would be stripped from him?

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The Dreams and the Meaning of אמת

The כתונת is followed by the two dreams. In the first, יוסף and his brothers gather bundles of grain in a field. His bundle rises and remains standing, while those of his brothers surround it and bow.

His brothers immediately understand the implication:

> וַיֹּאמְרוּ לוֹ אֶחָיו הֲמָלֹךְ תִּמְלֹךְ עָלֵינוּ אִם מָשׁוֹל תִּמְשֹׁל בָּנוּ וַיּוֹסִפוּ עוֹד שְׂנֹא אֹתוֹ עַל חֲלֹמֹתָיו וְעַל דְּבָרָיו. (בראשית לז:ח)

Will you indeed reign over us? Will you indeed rule us?

A second dream, involving the sun, moon, and eleven stars, further intensifies their reaction. But another question emerges. Why did יוסף tell his brothers these dreams?

He was not unaware of their hostility. יוסף, of all people, would later demonstrate an extraordinary ability to understand dreams. If he appreciated their significance, why did he not appreciate how his brothers would receive them? Perhaps this is one of the first indications that יוסף, although destined for extraordinary greatness, had not yet acquired the גדלות necessary to fulfill his purpose. The dreams might have been true. But **not everything that is true must be spoken, nor must every אמת be revealed immediately**.

This is closely related to the understanding of אמת developed in our discussion of פרשת תולדות. It is אמת that is not merely the accurate statement of an isolated fact. Its expression requires an understanding of what must be accomplished, the circumstances in which it must be revealed, and the consequences of its revelation. Perhaps יוסף was still learning that distinction. Or are we left to believe that יוסף lacked the insight into his actions as we might surmise for יעקב? I find that hard to believe.

יעקב's response to the dreams is especially revealing. He publicly rebukes יוסף, yet the תורה concludes:

> וַיְקַנְאוּ בוֹ אֶחָיו וְאָבִיו שָׁמַר אֶת הַדָּבָר. (בראשית לז:יא)

His brothers envied him, but his father kept the matter.

יעקב is שומר the matter. רש״י explains that יעקב was waiting and anticipating the fulfillment of the dream.[8] But what does it mean for יעקב to guard the דבר as the future of his בית? It was יעקב who was not merely preserving a memory of the dream. He was guarding the דבר itself, while its fulfillment would unfold through השגחה (*Divine providence*). But the fulfillment of that dream would not emerge through the ordinary continuation of the family as it then existed.

יוסף would have to descend to מצרים. He would need to undergo tremendous ניסיונות, acquire his own גדלות, and become the משנה למלך. Only then would the brothers come before him, and only then would the dream of the grain receive its practical meaning.

And what would send יוסף to מצרים?

The brothers' קנאה.

How would this קנאה become the means of fulfilling the dream?

We must be careful. The תורה does not say that יעקב intended to provoke the brothers or that he knew the events that would follow. This only sharpens the difficulty raised by חז״ל. As they teach us never to imitate such favoritism. Yet through השגחה, its consequences became part of the process through which יוסף would grow, while teaching all subsequent generations why such conduct must not be repeated. The very act חז״ל warn against moves the story forward. How can both be true?

The comparison to עקידת יצחק comes to mind. אברהם אבינו was commanded to undertake an action that appeared to contradict the very future promised through יצחק. The purpose was not immediately visible within the act itself. Of course, there is an essential difference: אברהם received an explicit ציווי, whereas no such command is recorded concerning the כתונת. The comparison leaves us with the question of how an act whose purpose is not visible within the act itself may belong to a larger divine purpose. This, too, brings us back to יעקב's מידת האמת: not the convenient truth, but what אמת must ultimately be established, and through whom?



תפארת and the Formation of One בית

We must understand what the בית of יעקב was destined to become. יעקב represents מידת התפארת, the harmony of differing כוחות. But harmony is not simply the peaceful coexistence of separate individuals. Each possessed his own מדרגה, strengths, weaknesses, and future תפקיד. Their differences were not defects to be eliminated. They were essential elements of the בית that would become כלל ישראל.

A family may share one father while remaining deeply divided. The inability of the brothers to speak to יוסף בשלום reveals that the בית had not yet achieved the unity required of it.

How could those relationships change?

There is a useful analogy from the physical world. A body continues in its established state of motion unless acted upon by an external force. So too the passage of time alone does not necessarily change its direction. Human beings are not governed by mechanical laws in the same manner. They possess בחירה. Nevertheless, the analogy illustrates something important: people can remain fixed in familiar relationships, assumptions, and patterns of conduct until circumstances force them to reconsider. Through the כתונת and the קנאה, a force was produced that became those circumstances for the brothers and יוסף.

ראובן would need to confront the meaning of losing the בכורה. And יהודה would need to acquire the responsibility demanded by מלכות. As would לוי take on the notion of עבודה. It is יוסף who would need to grow into his own מדרגה of יסוד. And the other brothers would need to confront their קנאה and their treatment of יוסף. The goal was not twelve identical individuals. It was twelve distinct שבטים capable of

forming one harmonious בית. Through השגחה, such harmony would require a process of transformation.

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From תפארת to יסוד

The אריז״ל associates יעקב with תפארת and יוסף with יסוד. These are not disconnected מדרגות. The יסוד gathers and extends the השפעות that precede it, enabling their continuation. This offers a deeper meaning to the name יוסף, an expression of תוספת. Here יוסף does not replace יעקב. He extends what יעקב has established. There is another dimension to this relationship.

ספר יצירה discusses ברית הלשון and ברית המעור. These are not two independent בריתות that must later be joined. Rather, they express one ברית through its upper and lower dimensions. The technical relationships among דעת, תפארת, and יסוד require careful distinction, but the conceptual unity of the ברית is essential to our argument. יעקב is associated with the קול.

> וַיִּגַּשׁ יַעֲקֹב אֶל יִצְחָק אָבִיו וַיְמֻשֵּׁהוּ וַיֹּאמֶר הַקֹּל קוֹל יַעֲקֹב וְהַיָּדַיִם יְדֵי עֵשָׂו. (בראשית כז:כב)

The voice is the voice of Yaakov.

יוסף will become distinguished through שמירת הברית in the most difficult circumstances. The ברית must extend from the בית of יעקב into a world far removed from that בית. But יוסף cannot merely inherit his father's spiritual accomplishments. The אריז״ל discusses יוסף as יסוד in both קטנות and גדלות. His essential מדרגה is not something he acquires from another ספירה. Rather, he must grow into its mature expression.[9]

There is an additional רמז concerning פי שנים. Here יוסף receives the double portion of בכורה through אפרים and מנשה, while לוי has no ordinary territorial נחלה. Yet the עבודה of לוי has a twofold expression through משה and אהרן, corresponding to נצח and הוד. In this sense, לוי too may be said to have a פי שנים, not in נחלה, but in two complementary מדרגות of עבודה.

יעקב can give יוסף the כתונת.

He cannot give him the גדלות of יסוד.

That is something יוסף must acquire through his own עבודה.

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את אחי אנכי מבקש

The next stage of the narrative is particularly revealing. יעקב sends יוסף to investigate the welfare of his brothers and their sheep.

> וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ לֶךְ נָא רְאֵה אֶת שְׁלוֹם אַחֶיךָ וְאֶת שְׁלוֹם הַצֹּאן וַהֲשִׁבֵנִי דָּבָר וַיִּשְׁלָחֵהוּ מֵעֵמֶק חֶבְרוֹן וַיָּבֹא שְׁכֶמָה. (בראשית לז:יד)

Go now and see how your brothers and the flock are faring.

Why does יעקב send יוסף to brothers who cannot speak to him בשלום? What שלום does he expect יוסף to find? And why include the welfare of the flock? Perhaps this is already related to the question of sustenance that will eventually dominate the story. יוסף travels to שכם, but cannot find his brothers. At this moment the journey could have ended. He had made a genuine attempt to fulfill his father's request. He could have returned home. Instead, an איש finds him wandering in the field. רש״י identifies the איש as גבריאל.

The מלאך asks:

וַיִּמְצָאֵהוּ אִישׁ וְהִנֵּה תֹּעֶה בַּשָּׂדֶה וַיִּשְׁאָלֵהוּ הָאִישׁ לֵאמֹר **מַה תְּבַקֵּשׁ**. (בראשית לז:טו)

What are you seeking?

And יוסף answers:

וַיֹּאמֶר **אֶת אַחַי אָנֹכִי מְבַקֵּשׁ** הַגִּידָה נָּא לִי אֵיפֹה הֵם רֹעִים. (בראשית לז:טז)

I am seeking my brothers.

At the level of פשט, here יוסף is asking for the location of his brothers. But the formulation deserves attention. He does not merely say that he is looking for a destination. He declares that he seeks his brothers. In our proposed מהלך, this expresses the essential direction of יסוד: the desire for קשר and חיבור.

Yet the מלאך replies:

וַיֹּאמֶר הָאִישׁ **נָסְעוּ מִזֶּה** כִּי שָׁמַעְתִּי אֹמְרִים נֵלְכָה דֹתָיְנָה וַיֵּלֶךְ יוֹסֵף אַחַר אֶחָיו וַיִּמְצָאֵם בְּדֹתָן. (בראשית לז:יז)

They have departed from here.

רש״י explains:

הסיעו עצמן מן האחוה. *They removed themselves from brotherhood.*

יוסף seeks אחוה. The brothers have removed themselves from it. There is a רמז in the word אחוה itself: אח, the relationship of brothers, joined with ו״ה: the ו alludes to ז״ק of זעיר אנפין, and the final ה to נוקבא, through which the relationship comes to expression. The שבטים were already אחים by birth, but אחוה — the affection and closeness between them — still had to be realized.

And the תורה emphasizes the distance between them:

וַיִּרְאוּ אֹתוֹ מֵרָחֹק וּבְטֶרֶם יִקְרַב אֲלֵיהֶם וַיִּתְנַכְּלוּ אֹתוֹ לַהֲמִיתוֹ. (בראשית לז:יח)

They saw him from afar; before he could approach them, they conspired to kill him.

They see him from afar. Before he can approach them, they conspire against him. The contrast between distance and closeness is extraordinary. יוסף is approaching because he seeks his brothers. They resolve to destroy him before he can come close. The רמב״ן explains that הקב״ה arranged for the איש to direct יוסף to his brothers so that the divine plan would unfold.[10] This becomes particularly important in our understanding of יעקב's שמירה of the dream. The process could have stopped at שכם, but השגחה ensures that יוסף reaches דותן. There it is גבריאל's שליחות that is not incidental. So we are left wondering again: Was this all "accidental"? What was יעקב intending?

And perhaps his question establishes the purpose of יוסף's journey before the terrible פירוד begins. יוסף seeks אחוה, but neither he nor his brothers have yet acquired the מדרגות necessary to accomplish it. The road toward lasting קרבה must first pass through an extraordinary separation.

The culmination will come much later, when יוסף invites his brothers:

וַיֹּאמֶר יוֹסֵף אֶל אֶחָיו **גְּשׁוּ נָא אֵלַי וַיִּגָּשׁוּ** וַיֹּאמֶר אֲנִי יוֹסֵף אֲחִיכֶם אֲשֶׁר מְכַרְתֶּם אֹתִי מִצְרָיְמָה. (בראשית מה:ד)

Please come close to me; and they came close.

At the beginning, יוסף approaches them and they reject him. At the end, he will possess the גדלות to bring them close.

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The Brothers and Their מלחמה

The פסוק does not name the brother who first proposed killing יוסף, although רש״י identifies שמעון and לוי.

> וַיֹּאמְרוּ אִישׁ אֶל אָחִיו הִנֵּה בַעַל הַחֲלֹמוֹת הַלָּזֶה בָּא. (בראשית לז:יט)

They said to one another: Here comes that master of dreams.

They speak collectively, identifying יוסף not as their brother but as the בעל החלומות. The title is dismissive. Yet it also reveals what troubles them. They do not merely oppose יוסף. They oppose what his dreams represent.

They continue:

> וְעַתָּה לְכוּ וְנַהַרְגֵהוּ וְנַשְׁלִכֵהוּ בְּאַחַד הַבֹּרוֹת וְאָמַרְנוּ חַיָּה רָעָה אֲכָלָתְהוּ וְנִרְאֶה מַה יִּהְיוּ חֲלֹמֹתָיו. (בראשית לז:כ)

Come now, let us kill him and cast him into one of the pits.

And they conclude:

> וְעַתָּה לְכוּ וְנַהַרְגֵהוּ וְנַשְׁלִכֵהוּ בְּאַחַד הַבֹּרוֹת וְאָמַרְנוּ חַיָּה רָעָה אֲכָלָתְהוּ **וְנִרְאֶה מַה יִּהְיוּ חֲלֹמֹתָיו**. (בראשית לז:כ)

Then we shall see what becomes of his dreams.

Their intention is to demonstrate that the dreams cannot be fulfilled. רש״י, citing חז״ל, interprets these final words as the response of רוח הקודש: we shall see whose words prevail, those of the brothers or those of הקב״ה Himself.[11] This captures the central irony. The brothers seek to destroy the dreams, but their actions will bring the dreams closer to fulfillment. The ספורנו explains that the brothers regarded יוסף as a רודף and believed their actions were justified.[12] That interpretation is especially important because it suggests that they did not necessarily understand themselves as committing an ordinary act of hatred. They believed they were defending themselves.

Their קנאה was not simply the desire to possess what יוסף possessed. It may have involved a deeper fear that יוסף's elevation would come at their expense.

But this was their fundamental error.

The position יוסף was destined to occupy would ultimately preserve their existence rather than threaten it.

ראובן and the First Attempt at Rescue

It is significant that the פסוק leaves the original instigator unnamed but names ראובן when he intervenes.

> וַיִּשְׁמַע רְאוּבֵן וַיַּצִּל�ֵהוּ מִיָּדָם וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא נַכֶּנּוּ נָפֶשׁ. (בראשית לז:כא)

Reuven heard and rescued him from their hands, saying: Let us not strike him down.

Why specifically נפש? At the level of פשט, it refers to taking יוסף's life. The brothers had proposed killing יוסף and placing his body in one of several pits. ראובן intervenes and proposes placing him in a particular pit instead, intending to return and rescue him.

There is a distinction between the brothers' indefinite expression and ראובן's specific instruction:

> וְעַתָּה לְכוּ וְנַהַרְגֵהוּ וְנַשְׁלִכֵהוּ **בְּאַחַד הַבֹּרוֹת** וְאָמַרְנוּ חַיָּה רָעָה אֲכָלָתְהוּ וְנִרְאֶה מַה יִּהְיוּ חֲלֹמֹתָיו. (בראשית לז:כ)

Into one of the pits.

> וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם רְאוּבֵן אַל תִּשְׁפְּכוּ דָם הַשְׁלִיכוּ אֹתוֹ אֶל **הַבּוֹר הַזֶּה** אֲשֶׁר בַּמִּדְבָּר וְיָד אַל תִּשְׁלְחוּ בוֹ לְמַעַן הַצִּיל אֹתוֹ מִיָּדָם לַהֲשִׁיבוֹ אֶל אָבִיו. (בראשית לז:כב)

Into this pit.

Why this pit? Did ראובן understand its danger? And how does his attempt to save יוסף relate to the fact that he himself had lost the privileges of בכורה? It is striking that the original בכור attempts to preserve the נפש of the brother who will ultimately receive his בכורה. This is another part of the larger question of what responsibility a בכור bears toward his brothers.



The First Garment — יריד

The brothers strip יוסף of his garments.

> וַיְהִי כַּאֲשֶׁר בָּא יוֹסֵף אֶל אֶחָיו וַיַּפְשִׁיטוּ אֶת יוֹסֵף אֶת כֻּתָּנְתּוֹ אֶת כְּתֹנֶת הַפַּסִּים אֲשֶׁר עָלָיו. (בראשית לז:כג)

They stripped Yosef of his tunic, the special tunic that was upon him.

The repeated expressions are striking. רש״י distinguishes between יוסף's ordinary garment and the כתונת פסים. The פירוש הרוקח also makes a distinction between the garment against his body and the outer כתונת he was wearing.[13] The brothers initially intended to destroy יוסף himself. They then strip him of the clothing that represents his position and distinction. Finally, through the מכירה, they remove him from his father and from the בית in which he had been raised. They seek to dismantle the יוסף they know.

Yet perhaps this terrible humiliation also becomes part of his necessary development. We asked why יוסף had shared his dreams so openly. Perhaps the נער who possessed a genuine purpose had not yet acquired the sensitivity and humility necessary to carry it properly. The כתונת represented what he was destined to become. But he could not remain dependent upon that garment. The brothers remove it by force. They cast him downward into the בור. And from there he will descend into מצרים — a יריד לצורך עליה.

This is יריד in its most literal form. But it is also the beginning of an inward transformation. The garment is taken from him so that he must discover what remains when everything external is gone.



והבור רק אין בו מים

The תורה states:

> וַיִּקָּחֻהוּ וַיַּשְׁלִכוּ אֹתוֹ הַבֹּרָה **וְהַבּוֹר** רֵק **אֵין בּוֹ מָיִם**. (בראשית לז:כד)

The pit was empty; it contained no water.

חז״ל explain that although the בור contained no water, it contained נחשים ועקרבים within it.[14] The apparent repetition has a deeper significance. Water is also associated with תורה.

> **אֵין מַיִם אֶלָּא תּוֹרָה**. (בבא קמא יז ע״א)

Water refers to Torah.

The זוהר הקדוש develops the spiritual significance of the empty בור and the danger associated with the absence or neglect of תורה living.[15] But this raises an immediate difficulty. יוסף did not abandon תורה. He was forcibly cast into the בור. Perhaps the distinction is between an environment empty of תורה and a person who carries תורה within himself. יוסף is removed from בית יעקב, where his קדושה and learning were supported by his father and his surroundings. He is thrust into an environment where those supports will no longer be present. If a person possesses תורה only because of the environment surrounding him, what remains when he is taken from that environment?

He must not merely preserve the external practices of the בית. He must possess the קדושה of that בית so deeply that it remains with him even in a place of spiritual constriction. The בור is therefore not merely a symbol of emptiness. It becomes the setting in which we discover whether the person thrown into it possesses an inner fullness that cannot be taken away. This has a particular resonance with חנוכה.

The יוונים sought to cause כלל ישראל to forget תורה. Yet the struggle against them became associated with a renewed revelation of Torah's light. The בני ישששכר discusses the relationship between אור הגנוז, תורה, and נרות חנוכה for us.[16] The concealed light is not necessarily extinguished because it is hidden. Under the proper circumstances, something of that light may be revealed. The קדושה received from יעקב does not disappear when יוסף descends into מצרים. It must become capable of illuminating a place where that קדושה is not outwardly present.

יוסף does not merely endure גלות.

He thrives there.

That is a much greater achievement.



לחם, מלחמה, and the Hunger for Survival

The brothers place יוסף in the בור, and then sit down to eat.

> וַיֵּשְׁבוּ לֶאֱכָל לָחֶם וַיִּשְׂאוּ עֵינֵיהֶם וַיִּרְאוּ וְהִנֵּה אֹרְחַת יִשְׁמְעֵאלִים בָּאָה מִגִּלְעָד וּגְמַלֵּיהֶם נֹשְׂאִים נְכֹאת וּצְרִי וָלֹט הוֹלְכִים לְהוֹרִיד מִצְרָיְמָה. (בראשית לז:כה)

They sat down to eat bread.

Why does the תורה need to tell us this? The brothers have just subjected their own brother to terrible danger. Yet they are capable of sitting down together for a meal.

The פירוש הרוקח offers an especially troubling explanation:

וישבו לאכול לחם מחמת שמחה. *They sat to eat bread out of joy.*

According to the רוקח, their eating arose from שמחה at their success.[13] What was the source of that שמחה? Why does the רוקח describe their eating specifically as arising from שמחה? There is a difference between relief and שמחה. If we take the ספורנו's approach that the שבטים deemed יוסף truly as a רודף, would a סעודת הודאה be out of order? Do we do anything different on פורים? The challenge is that we know better. Without the רוקח, I might have said that it was more like a סעודת אבילות, but clearly this is the opposite. I feel as though there may be more here, but at this moment I feel as though I am in the בור and not privy to understanding, צ״ע.

There is also a רמז in the relationship between לחם and מלחמה. Bread represents sustenance, and wars are often fought over the means of survival. The brothers appear to be engaged in a struggle over what they believe necessary for their future. They fear יוסף's authority because they believe his elevation threatens their standing.

Yet the first dream had concerned bundles of grain. And years later, famine would force these same brothers to descend into מצרים. The brothers who sat down to eat while יוסף suffered would eventually depend upon יוסף for their own לחם. Their מלחמה against יוסף would result in the elevation of the very person who would ultimately sustain them.

They believed they were fighting for survival.

In reality, their survival would come through the brother they had fought.

The hunger of the narrative is not limited to food. There is a hunger for affection, standing, control, and physical satisfaction. These different desires appear throughout the פרשה. But the central question is not whether a person possesses desire. It is whether desire remains directed toward the self or becomes capable of serving something greater.

✦

טרף טרף — The Pain of a Father

The brothers take the כתונת, dip it in the blood of a שעיר עזים, and send it to יעקב. They do not explicitly inform him that יוסף has died. Instead, they ask him to recognize the garment.

> וַיְשַׁלְּחוּ אֶת כְּתֹנֶת הַפַּסִּים וַיָּבִיאוּ אֶל אֲבִיהֶם וַיֹּאמְרוּ זֹאת מָצָאנוּ **הַכֶּר נָא הַכְּתֹנֶת בִּנְךָ הִוא אִם לֹא.** (בראשית לז:לב)

Please recognize whether this is your son's tunic.

יעקב recognizes it and declares:

> וַיַּכִּירָהּ וַיֹּאמֶר כְּתֹנֶת בְּנִי חַיָּה רָעָה אֲכָלָתְהוּ **טָרֹף טֹרַף יוֹסֵף.** (בראשית לז:לג)

It is my son's tunic. A wild animal has devoured him; Yosef has surely been torn apart.

The repetition of טרף deserves explanation. There may be a deeper sense in which יוסף has been torn apart. The brothers have stripped away his external identity, his position within the בית, his freedom, and his connection to יעקב. The analogy to טריפה is suggestive. A creature may remain physically alive while suffering a wound that compromises its integrity. יוסף remains alive, but the brothers have attempted to destroy the person he was within בית יעקב. Yet this raises another question.

What does יעקב's grief reveal when the son he mourns is still alive, yet has been torn from him? Perhaps, בדרך אפשר, his anguish can also be understood as bearing the suffering of his living son. He could grieve the suffering his son endured without knowing that יוסף was alive. The humiliation, loneliness, בושה, and terrible separation were real, even if they would eventually serve a greater purpose. יעקב was נושא בעול עם חבירו — bearing the burden of another. And who was closer to him than יוסף? The fact that a painful process may lead toward גדלות does not remove the pain of a father mourning someone beloved.

Indeed, the תורה immediately tells us that יעקב tore his own clothing.

> וַיִּקְרַע יַעֲקֹב שִׂמְלֹתָיו וַיָּשֶׂם שַׂק בְּמָתְנָיו וַיִּתְאַבֵּל עַל בְּנוֹ יָמִים רַבִּים. (בראשית לז:לד)

Yaakov tore his garments.

The brothers strip יוסף of his garments. ראובן tears his garments first[17], and יעקב later tears his own. The separation wounds ראובן as well as father and son. יעקב's belief that יוסף had been killed is the פשט. The proposed deeper reading of his grief stands alongside it, not in its place. But it may explain how a father can experience profound grief over suffering that השגחה will ultimately direct toward a greater purpose.

✦

יהודה — A Second ירידה

The תורה now turns to יהודה.

> וַיְהִי בָּעֵת הַהִוא וַיֵּרֶד יְהוּדָה מֵאֵת אֶחָיו וַיֵּט עַד אִישׁ עֲדֻלָּמִי וּשְׁמוֹ חִירָה. (בראשית לח:א)

At that time, Yehuda descended from his brothers.

Why interrupt the story of יוסף with the life of יהודה? Perhaps because the formation of the בית requires the development of two different מדרגות. Here יוסף must acquire the גדלות of יסוד. And יהודה must become worthy of the responsibility of מלכות. And neither reaches that מדרגה without a difficult process. The contrast begins with בכורה. By now ראובן, the original בכור, has lost his privileges. יוסף, the בכור of רחל, is being prepared for the position that will eventually belong to בני יוסף. And now ער, the בכור of יהודה, dies. Once again, the תורה brings us to the relationship between בכורה, זרע, and the continuity of the בית.

יהודה instructs אונן to perform יבום and establish זרע for his deceased brother. But אונן refuses.

> וַיֵּדַע אוֹנָן כִּי לֹא לוֹ יִהְיֶה הַזָּרַע וְהָיָה אִם בָּא אֶל אֵשֶׁת אָחִיו וְשִׁחֵת אַרְצָה לְבִלְתִּי נְתָן זֶרַע לְאָחִיו. (בראשית לח:ט)

Onan knew that the offspring would not be his.

The תורה describes him destroying the possibility of conception because the offspring would not be attributed to himself. This is deeply troubling. Why would אונן prefer השחתת זרע to the continuation of his brother's בית? What exactly was so objectionable about establishing זרע for ער? We should not rush to answer this question. The issue reaches toward the foundations of בכורה and אחוה. What does one brother owe another? Is the existence of a בית something preserved only for oneself, or is one responsible for the continuation of another? The question reaches all the way back to קין and הבל.

> וַיֹּאמֶר ה׳ אֶל קַיִן אֵי הֶבֶל אָחִיךָ וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא יָדַעְתִּי הֲשֹׁמֵר אָחִי אָנֹכִי. (בראשית ד:ט)

Am I my brother's keeper?

קין asks whether he is responsible for his brother.

יוסף declares:

> וַיֹּאמֶר אֶת אַחַי אָנֹכִי מְבַקֵּשׁ הַגִּידָה נָּא לִי אֵיפֹה הֵם רֹעִים. (בראשית לז:טז)

I am seeking my brothers.

And the institution of יבום expresses a further dimension of that responsibility: preserving the continuity of a brother who has died. These are not identical obligations. But their appearance within the same larger narrative is significant.

✦

תמר and the Hidden Beginnings of מלכות

The story of תמר adds another difficulty. After the death of ער and אונן, their father יהודה withholds שלה from marriage. תמר then conceals her identity and encounters יהודה.

The תורה states:

> וַיִּרְאֶהָ יְהוּדָה וַיַּחְשְׁבֶהָ לְזוֹנָה כִּי כִסְּתָה פָנֶיהָ. (בראשית לח:טו)

She had covered her face.

The concealment immediately recalls the concept of הסתר פנים. There is also a striking resemblance to לאה, whose identity remained concealed from יעקב until morning. Both narratives involve concealment, later recognition, and the future emergence of יהודה's line. But the encounter of יהודה and תמר cannot be understood merely as an ordinary failure of physical restraint. בראשית רבה describes how a מלאך הממונה על התאוה brought about the encounter, despite יהודה initially intending to pass by.[18] That מדרש presents the event as part of an extraordinary divine purpose.

And there is a still greater מדרש that places the entire narrative into perspective. בראשית רבה teaches that while the brothers were occupied with selling יוסף, we find יוסף, ראובן, and יעקב were occupied with sackcloth and fasting, and יהודה was occupied with establishing a household, הקב״ה was preparing the light of מלך המשיח for the future.[19]

The people involved saw the immediate circumstances. We should not assume the brothers understood the future הקב״ה was preparing. And yet the שמחה of the רוקח does not leave me.

הקב״ה was preparing the future of כלל ישראל.

This is not merely the preparation of יוסף to become the משנה למלך. It is the preparation of the line from which דוד המלך and ultimately מלך המשיח would emerge. From יהודה and תמר comes פרץ. And from פרץ eventually comes דוד. The potential challenge of the nature of כלתו is its own interesting topic that I could not omit, but it requires its own analysis.

The unusual birth of פרץ and זרח, with the apparent competition surrounding which would emerge first, adds another dimension to our recurring discussion of בכורה. The later history of רות and בועז again involves preserving the continuity of a family whose future appears threatened. Their union is not ordinary יבום under the later halachic framework, but the relationship to גאולה and establishing the name of the deceased is explicit. Thus, the emergence of מלכות repeatedly occurs through circumstances in which the continuation of the בית appears uncertain. This deserves further investigation within the larger kuntress on בכורה.

✦

The Contrast Between יסוד and מלכות

We cannot overlook the juxtaposition of יהודה and תמר with יוסף and אשת פוטיפר. The narratives both involve questions of desire, relationships, garments or identifying objects, and responsibility. Yet the outcomes are very different. יהודה's story becomes the beginning of the lineage of מלכות, whereas יוסף's story becomes the great demonstration of שמירת הברית. But we should not simply describe יהודה as someone surrendering to desire and יוסף as someone overcoming it. The מדרש concerning יהודה and תמר complicates that comparison considerably. Perhaps the deeper distinction concerns the different forms of גדלות required of יסוד and מלכות.

יסוד must preserve the ברית and extend its קדושה. And מלכות must learn to govern the complicated realities of human desire, authority, responsibility, and תיקון. Meanwhile, יהודה's later development is especially revealing. The brother who once proposed selling יוסף eventually offers himself as an עבד in place of בנימין. His capacity for leadership has not disappeared. Its direction has changed. It must be understood that the בחינה of יוסף must precede the true fulfillment of דוד, and for that יבין המבין.

And generations later, דוד המלך becomes the great example of תשובה. There, חז״ל explicitly teach that his episode serves to establish the path of תשובה for the individual.[20] The royal line is not presented as an uninterrupted history of outward perfection. It repeatedly confronts questions of desire and responsibility, including the later challenges of דוד and שלמה. This may be important to the distinction between the different כתרים.

The רמב״ם describes כתר כהונה as belonging to אהרן, while כתר מלכות as acquired by דוד and subsequently inherited by his descendants, and כתר תורה as available to anyone willing to acquire it.[21]

A position may become hereditary.

But the character necessary to fulfill it cannot simply be inherited.

That is true for the king, and it is true for יוסף.

✦

מצרים — The World of Constriction

The תורה returns to יוסף in מצרים. He has been sold into slavery, deprived of his family and his freedom, and placed within a civilization of extraordinary material resources. Rebbe would bring, in the name of the אריז״ל, the association of מצרים with מיצר ים, an image of constriction. There is a striking paradox here. מצרים possesses the Nile, agricultural abundance, wealth, and tremendous worldly power.

Yet abundance itself can become a form of constriction when a civilization is governed by גשמיות and physical desire. Even the offices of the שר המשקים, שר האופים, and שר הטבחים are described through the language of food and bodily sustenance. These are genuine court offices rather than merely ordinary food occupations, but their terminology is suggestive within the larger narrative. יוסף must live within this environment. He must preserve the קדושה of יעקב while surrounded by temptation, luxury, and the possibility of worldly success. And the תורה repeatedly emphasizes that הקב״ה is with him.

He succeeds in the household of פוטיפר. He is entrusted with responsibility. His master recognizes his effectiveness.

יוסף is not merely surviving.

He is already beginning to thrive.

Yet his greatest ניסיון is still ahead.

✦

אשת פוטיפר — The Second Garment

The תורה describes יוסף as physically attractive. אשת פוטיפר desires him and repeatedly attempts to persuade him to enter into a forbidden relationship. יוסף refuses.

> וַיְמָאֵן וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל אֵשֶׁת אֲדֹנָיו הֵן אֲדֹנִי לֹא יָדַע אִתִּי מַה בַּבָּיִת וְכֹל אֲשֶׁר יֶשׁ לוֹ נָתַן בְּיָדִי. (בראשית לט:ח)

But he refused.

His explanation is significant. His master has entrusted him with everything in the household, but has withheld his wife. יוסף recognizes both the trust placed in him and the איסור before הקב״ה.

> אֵינֶנּוּ גָדוֹל בַּבַּיִת הַזֶּה מִמֶּנִּי וְלֹא חָשַׂךְ מִמֶּנִּי מְאוּמָה כִּי אִם אוֹתָךְ בַּאֲשֶׁר אַתְּ אִשְׁתּוֹ וְאֵיךְ אֶעֱשֶׂה הָרָעָה הַגְּדֹלָה הַזֹּאת וְחָטָאתִי לֵאלֹקִים. (בראשית לט:ט)

How could I commit this great evil and sin against God?

Here the inner קדושה of יוסף becomes visible. He has been removed from his father, his בית, and the כתונת that once distinguished him. No familiar environment protects him. Yet he remains faithful to the ברית. Here חז״ל describe the דמות דיוקנו של אביו appearing to him during the ניסיון at that moment.[22] That is particularly important when compared with ראובן. In the past, ראובן's interference with his father's bed resulted in the loss of בכורה. However, יוסף, in the most difficult circumstances, preserves

his קדושה through the image of his father. The ברית of יעקב remains with him even when יעקב himself is physically absent. And now the תורה returns to the language of garments.

> וַתִּתְפְּשֵׂהוּ בְּבִגְדּוֹ לֵאמֹר שִׁכְבָה עִמִּי וַיַּעֲזֹב בִּגְדּוֹ בְּיָדָהּ וַיָּנָס וַיֵּצֵא הַחוּצָה. (בראשית לט:יב)

She seized him by his garment.

אשת פוטיפר seizes his garment.

But יוסף responds:

> וַתִּתְפְּשֵׂהוּ בְּבִגְדּוֹ לֵאמֹר שִׁכְבָה עִמִּי וַיַּעֲזֹב בִּגְדּוֹ בְּיָדָהּ וַיָּנָס וַיֵּצֵא הַחוּצָה. (בראשית לט:יב)

He left his garment in her hand, fled, and went outside.

The contrast with the first הפשטה is extraordinary. The brothers forcibly removed יוסף's garments. That began his ירידה. Now אשת פוטיפר seizes his garment, but יוסף willingly abandons it in order to preserve the ברית. **The first garment is taken from him, initiating his ירידה. The second he relinquishes through his own בחירה, revealing his עליה.** The first garment represented what יעקב had bestowed upon him. The second ניסיון reveals what יוסף has acquired within himself.

In the first episode, others act upon him.

In the second, יוסף chooses.

The change is not merely that he withstands physical temptation. He demonstrates that his identity is no longer dependent upon external distinctions, garments, or circumstances. He has begun to acquire the גדלות of יסוד. There is an additional parallel. In both episodes, someone uses יוסף's clothing to construct a false account. The brothers dip his כתונת in blood and allow יעקב to conclude that he has been killed. אשת פוטיפר uses his abandoned garment as evidence against him. The external appearance is made to testify falsely about the person. But precisely here, the inner אמת of יוסף is demonstrated.

He knows who he is, even when the evidence presented to others appears to establish the opposite. This is the maturity that may have been missing when the נער openly related his dreams.

The young יוסף possessed an אמת and proclaimed it.

The mature יוסף preserves אמת even when he cannot establish it publicly.

He has learned that אמת is not dependent upon winning the immediate argument or controlling how others perceive him.

✦

The Second ירידה

Yet the reward for יוסף's refusal is not immediate freedom. He is falsely accused and placed in prison. Once again he descends. But this ירידה is fundamentally different from the first. The first followed the forced stripping of a young man who had not yet acquired his full גדלות. The second follows an act of extraordinary שמירת הברית. He is imprisoned not because he surrendered to temptation, but because he refused it. The world may place him in another בור, but he is no longer the same יוסף who entered the first. And once again, the תורה emphasizes that הקב״ה remains with him. Within the prison, יוסף acquires responsibility and the trust of those around him.

His growth has not stopped. The very environment intended to restrain him becomes another place in which his capacities develop. This is the distinction between enduring גלות and thriving within it. יוסף does not merely remain untouched by מצרים. He becomes capable of acting, leading, interpreting, and sustaining others while living within it. The strength he received from יעקב has become his own.

✦

Dreams Again — But a Different יוסף

The final episode of וישב returns to dreams. This itself is remarkable. The פרשה begins with the dreams of יוסף, which he tells his brothers and which produce greater hatred. It ends with the dreams of two Egyptian officials, which יוסף interprets while imprisoned.

In the opening narrative, יוסף is the dreamer.

In the closing narrative, he becomes the interpreter.

And the content of these dreams returns us to the themes of food, sustenance, and survival. The שר המשקים dreams of a vine and its grapes. The שר האופים dreams of bread and baked goods. Both dreams concern objects of nourishment, but their interpretations lead toward opposite outcomes. One official will be restored to his position. The other will die. יוסף recognizes that the meaning of dreams belongs to הקב״ה.

> וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֵלָיו חֲלוֹם חָלַמְנוּ וּפֹתֵר אֵין אֹתוֹ וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלֵהֶם יוֹסֵף הֲלוֹא לֵאלֹקִים פִּתְרֹנִים סַפְּרוּ נָא לִי. (בראשית מ:ח)

Do not interpretations belong to God?

Perhaps this reveals another dimension of his growth. He no longer merely announces what he has seen. He receives the distress of others, invites them to speak, and interprets their dreams within the reality of their circumstances. He is learning to use his understanding for the benefit of others. This is the quality that will later enable him to interpret פרעה's dreams and prepare מצרים for the famine. But the פרשה does not conclude with יוסף's elevation. He asks the שר המשקים to remember him.

And the final פסוק tells us:

> וְלֹא זָכַר שַׂר הַמַּשְׁקִים אֶת יוֹסֵף וַיִּשְׁכָּחֵהוּ. (בראשית מ:כג)

The chief cupbearer did not remember Yosef, and he forgot him.

The שר המשקים does not remember יוסף.

He forgets him.

This ending deserves more attention than we have yet given it. At the beginning, יעקב was שומר the dream. At the end, an Egyptian official forgets the man who interpreted his dream. The contrast is suggestive. יעקב preserves the דבר because it concerns the ultimate future of the בית. The שר המשקים forgets יוסף because his own immediate problem has been resolved. Perhaps the two responses reveal the difference between understanding an event as part of a larger purpose and seeing it only through one's present needs. Yet even this forgetting becomes part of the timing of השגחה. And יוסף must remain in prison until the moment arrives when his particular capacities are required.

His גדלות is developing, but his journey is not complete.

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The Hidden Light of the Journey

We can now return to the larger question.

Why did יעקב give יוסף the כתונת?

Why did יוסף reveal the dreams?

Why did גבריאל ensure that he reached his brothers?

Why did the brothers strip him, throw him into a בור, and sell him into מצרים? And why must יוסף undergo another ניסיון involving the loss of his garment before descending once more into imprisonment? Perhaps the answer is that יוסף could not remain merely the beloved son of יעקב. He was destined to become the יסוד through which the קדושה of יעקב would extend beyond the בית itself. יוסף had received the תורה and קדושה of יעקב.

But he still needed to become יוסף הצדיק.

That required him to carry the ברית when his father was absent, to preserve אמת when others distorted his actions, to withstand temptation when no familiar protections remained, and to bring light into the spiritual constriction of מצרים. The כתונת, given by יעקב and stripped by the brothers, began the ירידה. The garment יוסף would later relinquish by his own בחירה would reveal his עליה.

But the fulfillment of that dream would emerge through famine. Their need for sustenance would bring them before יוסף, and his position would allow him to preserve them.

Their מלחמה against him would ultimately lead to the source of their לחם. The man who was stripped of the כתונת will become capable of giving sustenance to those who stripped him.

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The Purpose of the Transformation

The greater חידוש of the פרשה may not be limited to יוסף. They had to confront קנאה, pride, desire, neglect, responsibility, and the consequences of their own choices. יהודה had to learn the responsibility that would eventually be required of מלכות.

And all the brothers had to grow beyond a relationship in which the elevation of one was perceived as the destruction of the others.

The distinct כוחות were never meant to disappear.

They were meant to become harmonious.

יעקב was שומר the dream, even as השגחה would bring about its fulfillment through the events that followed. The dream concerned not merely the future elevation of his beloved son, but the future of a בית capable of carrying the ברית beyond itself. It is the recognition that genuine transformation often requires confronting what we most resist. Yet the brothers remain responsible for their conduct. Their actions are not justified because השגחה brought good from them.

Rather, the greatness of the divine מחשבה is that even actions intended for destruction can become part of a greater future. The מדרש describes הקב״ה preparing the light of מלך המשיח while the family is occupied with its own suffering and conflict. That may be the deepest image of the entire פרשה.

The brothers see the בור.

יעקב experiences the anguish of separation.

יהודה struggles through the beginning of his own ירידה.

יוסף faces slavery, temptation, and imprisonment.

Yet through these events, the foundations are being laid both for the preservation of בית יעקב in מצרים and for the distant future of מלכות בית דוד. The light remains concealed, but it is not absent. What יעקב gave יוסף through the כתונת was the sign of a position whose גדלות he could not give him.

The favoritism remains precisely what חז״ל warn against. The question was never whether יעקב foresaw the path. It is whether he could see its final value. Perhaps giving יוסף the כתונת was bound up

with the process through which he would become יוסף הצדיק. That does not mean the resulting rift was itself a model for conduct.

Yet through the brothers' קנאה and השגחה, the very garment that marked his position became the means through which יוסף would grow into it.

The brothers stripped him of his garment, beginning his ירידה.

But when יוסף could relinquish his garment through his own בחירה, his identity no longer depended upon it, and he had begun to acquire the גדלות of יסוד.

The כתונת could be removed.

יעקב could be taken from his sight.

His freedom and reputation could be lost.

But the ברית remained.

And through his own ניסיונות, there יוסף grew into the מדרגה necessary to carry it forward. יעקב established the harmony of תפארת. And יוסף became the יסוד through which that harmony could extend into גלות, sustain the שבטים, and preserve the future of כלל ישראל.

This is not how the story is usually taught, and I do not say it easily. But perhaps the שמחה described by the רוקח is the brothers sensing, without knowing it, the same final value that יעקב guarded knowingly. It is enough to recognize how השגחה could turn even this painful moment toward the eventual unity of כלל ישראל. When the challenges in our lives are so hard and real. We have that גם זו לטובה moment and the ותשחק ליום אחרון. May we be זוכה to see the טוב in the challenges in our lives. May we rise above the בורות we find ourselves in. May we never fail to see the אור that יון tries to hide from us. May we all come together despite our differences in deference to our Tatty, אבינו שבשמים.

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מראי מקומות

1. וְלֹא יָכְלוּ דַּבְּרוֹ לְשָׁלֹם ...בראשית לז:ד – וַיִּרְאוּ אֶחָיו כִּי אֹתוֹ אָהַב אֲבִיהֶם מִכָּל אֶחָיו
2. רמב״ן, בראשית לז:ג – חכמות וסתרי תורה; משכיל ובעל סוד.
3. כתונת פסים וגלות מצרים; שבת י ע״ב – לעולם אל ישנה אדם בנו בין הבנים.
4. בראשית לה:כב; שבת נה ע״ב – ראובן ובלהה, בלבול יצועי אביו.
5. דברי הימים א ה:א-ב – העברת הבכורה מראובן לבני יוסף, והנגידות ליהודה.
6. בראשית לז:ג – כתונת פסים והקשר לבכורה ולעבודה, כלי יקר.
7. בראשית מח:ה; מט:ג-ד; דברי הימים א ה:א-ב – הבכורה והעברתה.
8. רש״י, בראשית לז:יא – ואביו שמר את הדבר.
9. כתבי האריז״ל, שער הפסוקים, פרשת וישב – יוסף ובחינת יסוד; ועיין ספר יצירה בענין ברית הלשון וברית המעור.
10. רמב״ן, בראשית לז:טו – השגחה בהגעת יוסף אל אחיו.
11. רש״י, בראשית לז:כ – ונראה מה יהיו חלומותיו.
12. בראשית לז:יח-כה – טענת האחים ויחסם ליוסף, ספורנו.
13. בראשית לז:כג, רש״י ופירוש הרוקח על התורה – הכתונת והסעודה; וישבו לאכול לחם מחמת שמחה.
14. בבא קמא יז ע״א – אין מים אלא תורה; שבת כב ע״א – מים אין בו אבל נחשים ועקרבים יש בו.
15. זוהר הקדוש, פרשת וישב, על והבור רק אין בו מים – הבור והמשמעות הרוחנית של העדר המים.

16. אור הגנוז ונרות חנוכה, מאמרי חנוכה – אור התורה, מאמרי חודש כסלו וטבת, בני ישששכר.

17. ראובן בשובו אל הבור; בראשית לז:כט – ויקרע את בגדיו.

18. בראשית רבה פה – יהודה ותמר והמלאך הממונה על התאוה.

19. בראשית רבה פה:א – הקב״ה עוסק ובורא אורו של מלך המשיח.

20. עבודה זרה ד ע״ב – דוד המלך ותשובה.

21. הלכות מלכים א:ז – שלושת הכתרים; הלכות תלמוד תורה ג:א, רמב״ם; אבות ד:יג.

22. סוטה לו ע״ב – דמות דיוקנו של אביו בניסיונו של יוסף.

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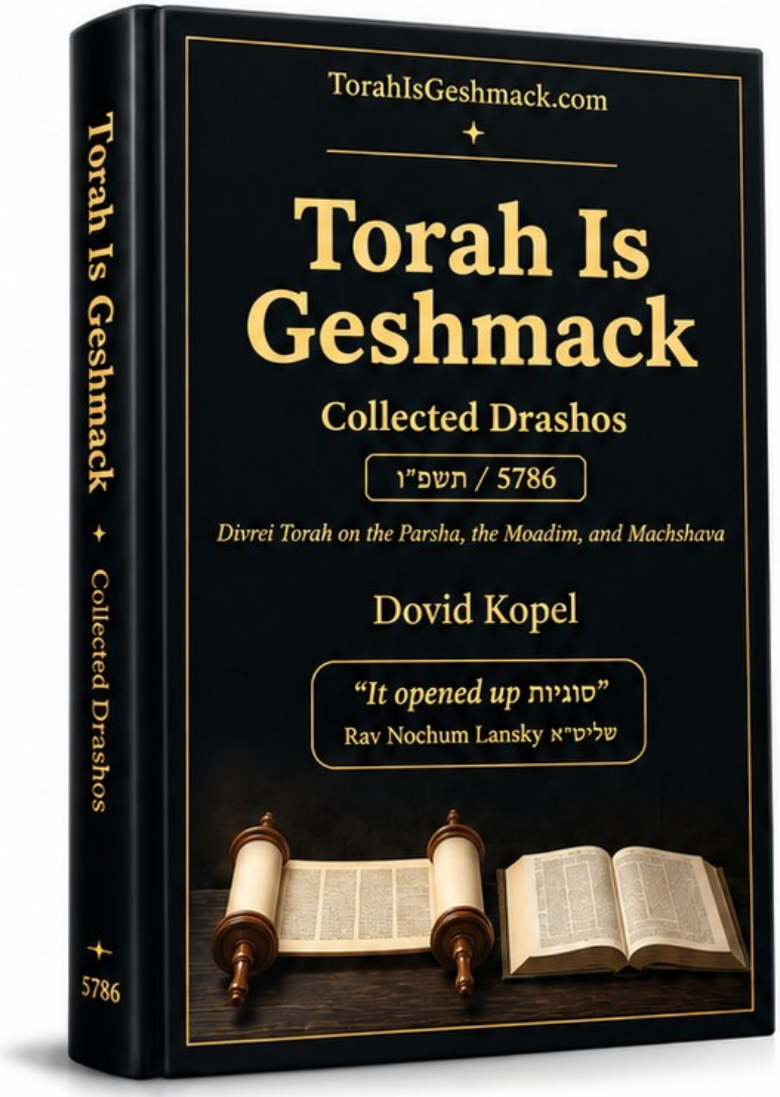
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