

SIDRA OF THE WEEK : מקץ

1. Although Yosef had asked the Chief Cup-bearer of Par'o, king of Egypt, to remember him and help end his undeserved imprisonment, the Chief Cup-bearer chose to forget him and Yosef remained in prison for another two years. Only when Par'o is shown a disturbing dream and he desperately asks for a proper interpretation, does the Chief Cup-bearer come forward. He tells Par'o how when he was in prison and was likewise troubled by a disturbingly vivid dream, a young foreign one-time slave had correctly interpreted his dream (and that of the Chief Baker) and perhaps this foreigner can help to explain the dreams of Par'o, too.
2. Yosef is summoned in all haste, but he is not to be rushed. Yosef is mindful of the miraculous ways of HaShem and he recognizes that after thirteen years, at last his time has come. He carefully prepares himself, and barbered and suitably robed, he comes before Par'o.
3. Before Par'o relates his dreams, however, Yosef tells him that it is HaShem alone Who gives any meaning to dreams — Yosef is only His instrument. Par'o then tells his dreams and Yosef explains what it is that HaShem is showing him: it is a warning that seven consecutive years of great plenty are to come to the land of Egypt but that these years will immediately be followed by seven years of dire famine. He advises Par'o that if the effect of the years of plenty is not to be lost, and if the country is not to be desolated by the famine, the produce of the years of plenty must be stored up for the following years. For this, continues Yosef, Par'o should appoint a man with understanding and wisdom, who can supervise the storing-up of the produce.
4. Even though Par'o has been offered other interpretations of his dream, some of them quite plausible, he recognizes the ring of truth in Yosef's explanation and advice. He appoints Yosef as Viceroy of Egypt with responsibilities to carry out the very plan he advised Par'o. In addition to putting him in charge of agriculture and provisions for the whole of Egypt, he publicly empowers him to implement and take responsibility for his plan to save the country. Bearing in mind the other possible interpretations of his dream, Par'o shrewdly also makes Yosef responsible for matters military, he appoints him as Chief Adviser to the king, he designates him "Minister of the Unknown" and he raises him to be the highest official in the land after Par'o himself.
5. Yosef marries Osnas, the foster-daughter of Potifehra the Lord of Ohn, and there are born to him his two sons, Ephrayyim and Menasheh.
6. The years of plenty come, and in accordance with Yosef's advice, all the surplus produce (together with a fifth part of all produce) is not exported but is stored up in the regions and cities where it was grown, under the authority of Par'o. Directly after these seven years of plenty, there follow the years of famine, just as predicted by Yosef. The people of Egypt — and of the neighbouring land of Kenaan which also is stricken with famine

— come to Yosef to buy food. All the harvests and crops have failed, and even the food that the people have themselves privately stored away has become rotten, so that everyone was dependent upon Yosef's stores. Yosef personally supervises the sale of the food, and by the end of the first year the people of Egypt are in debt to Par'o for the food that Yosef has dispensed to them all from his storehouses. Wealth flows into Egypt from the neighbouring countries as all the people come to exchange gold and silver for food, together with the people of Egypt.

7. In the land of Kenaan, too, famine ravages the country, and Yaakov sends his sons down to Egypt, each one to bring food for his family, for he sees that there is some hope in Egypt. (But Binyomin, the brother of Yosef and the only other son of Rochel, he did not send with them.) When the brothers come before Yosef — he had given orders that all foreign buyers were to be brought to him personally — he recognizes them instantly, but they do not recognize him at all, dressed as he is in the robes of high office and speaking only through an interpreter. They bow down to him, the dispenser of food. Through the interpreter they explain, in answer to his searching questions, that they have come from the land of Kenaan to buy food. Controlling his brotherly emotions, Yosef accuses them of being spies (an accusation almost impossible to disprove) and he has them imprisoned.
8. After three days, Yosef has them brought out of the dungeon and tells them that they can prove their innocence. He is ready to believe that the information the brothers have given him about their home-life back in the land of Kenaan is true, but they must prove it to be true. They had spoken about a youngest brother who, they said, had been left behind in Kenaan. Yosef intimates that while believing that this youngest brother does exist, he suspects that somehow he has evaded the screening of the foreigners who have come and that he is in hiding somewhere in Egypt (and perhaps gathering intelligence about the country). The brothers can demonstrate the truth of all they have said by bringing Binyomin down to Egypt with them next time they come. But meanwhile he will detain Shi'mon as a hostage.
9. On their journey home, the brothers are further shocked to find that their silver has been put back into their sacks of corn and they are afraid that this has been done so as to frame them for stealing.
10. Their father Yaakov is greatly troubled by what his sons have to tell him: the news of Shimon's detention; the Viceroy's insistence on having Binyomin brought down to him; the returned silver in their sacks. He refuses to let Binyomin go, and Shi'mon is left unredeemed in Egypt.
11. But the famine worsens. The food that they had brought from Egypt gives out and the brothers are forced to go back for more. Yosef has warned them not to appear before him without Binyomin, and at last, with a heart heavy with sad reluctance and a feeling of deep foreboding, Yaakov gives his permission that Binyomin should go with them. Feeling somewhat reassured by Yehuda's personal undertaking for Binyomin's safe return, Yaakov prays to HaShem that the man should relent and let the whole family be re-united once again. The brothers depart and come before Yosef, bringing with them a present to the Viceroy from their father Yaakov.

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12. Upon their arrival at his palace, Yosef gives orders for the brothers to be brought before him, to dine at his table. The brothers are frightened by this special treatment: they think that they are to be accused of stealing back their silver. And then, when one of the officials of the Viceroy's household assures them that their payment had been received, they are even more puzzled. At table, their uneasiness increases as they see how the Viceroy displays an uncanny knowledge of all the details of their home-life, too, and they marvel at his unsettling powers of mysterious intuition. The brothers are happy to leave at last all together this land of magic and mystery for Kenaan, with the ample provisions they have been given.
13. As they are leaving the metropolis, Yosef gives orders that they are to be overtaken and stopped, and charged with stealing the Viceroy's silver cup which is indispensable to him for his powers of divination. When they are confronted with this accusation, the brothers, confident of their innocence, submit to their belongings being searched — and the cup (which Yosef had previously ordered to be planted in Binyomin's baggage) is found. The brothers rend their garments at this new trouble and prepare themselves for a further ordeal at the hands of the all-powerful Viceroy of Egypt.
14. When they return to Yosef's palace, the brothers prostrate themselves before Yosef, submitting themselves to his power and rule, and rather than let Binyomin be put to death for the "theft" they offer themselves as Yosef's slaves. When Yosef sees how they are willing to give themselves for Binyomin, the youngest and most precious of their father's sons (all the more so since the disappearance of Yosef) he knows that the jealousy of the brothers of which he had been a victim has at last been eradicated and he feels confident that this blemish in the family of Yaakov no longer exists. But he must test them once more to ascertain that they would even be willing to risk their very lives for Binyomin's freedom. Yosef, the powerful Viceroy of Egypt, tells them that they are free to return home: only Binyomin, the "culprit," is to remain in Egypt as his slave. Yosef awaits their reaction.

For the explanation of the Haftorah of Sidra מקץ please go to HAFTORAS.