

# Parsha Ponders

Mikeitz | December 3, 2021 | 29 Kislev 5781

## *Previous ingratitude<sup>1</sup>*

וידבר שר המשקים את-פרעה לאמר את-חטאי אני מזכיר היום

The Minister of the Cup Bearers said to Pharaoh, saying: “I bring up my sins today”<sup>2</sup>

When Pharaoh had two troubling dreams, it distressed him greatly<sup>3</sup>. He searched all over Egypt, but no one could satisfactorily interpret the dreams. The Minister of the Cup Bearers, commonly referred to as Pharaoh’s Butler, recalled that Yosef two years earlier had interpreted the former’s dreams. Yosef told the Butler while they were both in jail that the Butler would soon be freed. Yosef requested that the Butler upon his release tell Pharaoh of his innocence. Yosef was framed and didn’t deserve to be in jail. The Butler was indeed released, and failed to give Pharaoh Yosef’s message. Pharaoh’s predicament reminded the Butler of all of this, and he was forced to tell Pharaoh of Yosef’s abilities.

The Butler began by admitting to Pharaoh that this recommendation had negative connotations for himself. It recalled the fact that he was once in jail for sinning against the king. Nevertheless, due to Pharaoh’s need for his dream to be interpreted, the Butler was willing to take the personal hit. However, if we analyze what he says, we’ll be surprised. Instead of him saying that he has to bring up his sin to Pharaoh, he says **sins**. This means by mentioning Yosef, he was recalling multiple sins. What else did the Butler do wrong? Our Sages say<sup>4</sup> he was referring to two additional<sup>5</sup> sins: that he forgot of Yosef’s existence, and that he failed to keep his promise to him. If so, why would the Butler feel the need to mention this to Pharaoh? What does Pharaoh care about the Butler’s wrongdoing to Yosef?

What was the Butler’s original sin that put him in jail<sup>6</sup>? A fly flew into Pharaoh’s cup of wine, and the Butler served it to him without realizing. This was considered a gross affront to the king’s honor. However, it was eventually determined that this was something out of his control. He had no intent on being disrespectful to the king. As a result, he was acquitted<sup>7</sup>.

It’s the way of the world that if someone does something that looks guilty, but they were never known to commit such a crime, they’ll be judged favorably<sup>8</sup>. However, if they’ve shown such behavior in the

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<sup>1</sup> Based on [Kesav Sofer](#) to [Genesis](#) 41:9

<sup>2</sup> [Genesis](#) *loc. cit.*

<sup>3</sup> V. 8 says ותפעם רוחו, which literally means his spirit rung like a bell. [Targum Onkelos ad. loc.](#) translates it as ומטרפא רוחיה, that his spirit was torn up, which is usually used to refer to someone going crazy. [Rashi ad. loc.](#) says the same

<sup>4</sup> [Bereishis Rabbah](#) 89:7 says only the second sin, and adds that another sin was that the Butler delayed telling Pharaoh about Yosef while the former was distressed. Perhaps the [Kesav Sofer](#) was referring to an unpublished *Midrash* brought in [Tanchuma Yashan Mevo](#) 11:23, brought by [Torah Sheleimah](#) Chapter 41 § 36

<sup>5</sup> I would have said that he was referring to only two sins, the first being the one that put him in jail in the first place, and the second being an additional sin, whatever it may be. Indeed, [Moshav Zekeinim ad. loc.](#) say this was the first sin, and the second sin is that he forgot Yosef. However, the *Midrash* brought in the previous note says that since he was acquitted, his original act which brought him to jail cannot be considered a sin on his part. Perhaps this is where [Bereishis Rabbah](#) *loc. cit.* was coming from as well. As we’ll see, the [Kesav Sofer](#) doesn’t go with this approach, which perhaps shows that he never intended to quote the above unpublished *Midrash*

<sup>6</sup> [Bereishis Rabbah](#) 88:2, brought by [Rashi](#) to [Genesis](#) 40:1

<sup>7</sup> The [Kesav Sofer](#) says this is from a *Midrash*. Perhaps he was referring to [Midrash Lekach Tov](#) and [Midrash Sechel Tov](#) to [Genesis](#) 40:21, brought by [Riva ad. loc.](#)

<sup>8</sup> I’m not sure if he’s referring to Jewish society, or society at large. This definitely doesn’t seem to be the worldwide practice today

past, this new questionable act will be judged negatively. Now, the Egyptian court originally judged the Butler as being guilty of dishonoring the king. He was *kafui tovah*, lacking in personal gratitude, for all that the king of Egypt does for the country. However, they weren't sure. Since his mistake of giving a fly to the king was unclear, perhaps it was an honest mistake, and since he wasn't known for being a *kafui tov*, they eventually acquitted him.

The problem was, since the Butler was an ingrate with regards to Yosef, who interpreted his dream in a positive way, and the Butler failed to live up to his promise, we see that indeed he was a *kafui tov*. It turns out then that when the Butler shared his knowledge of Yosef's existence, he was in a sense reopening his court case. He was declaring that he's been ingrateful in the past, and that now brings into question whether his bringing a fly to the king was an act of ingratitude. This is why he said that due to the pressing circumstances, he is compelled to now recall multiple sins, that of forgetting and ignoring Yosef, and that of bringing the fly to Pharaoh<sup>9</sup>.

Good Shabbos and Have a *lichtege Chanukah*

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<sup>9</sup> Although, this doesn't necessarily explain why the Butler had to do the math for Pharaoh. Perhaps had he kept quiet, Pharaoh wouldn't have realized the significance of mentioning Yosef. Maybe the Butler felt that it was in his best interest to be open and honest, to show that he wasn't hiding anything