

# Parsha Ponders

Vayeishev | Dec 7, 2023 | 25 Kislev 5784

## *The wealth of a good name<sup>1</sup>*

וַיֵּבֵא הַבַּיִתָּה לַעֲשׂוֹת מְלָאכְתּוֹ וְאִין אִישׁ מֵאַנְשֵׁי הַבַּיִת שָׁם בְּבֵית

[Yosef] went to the house to “do his work”, and there was no one else in the house<sup>2</sup>

While Yosef was a slave in Egypt, his master Potiphar’s wife was relentless. She wouldn’t give up on trying to seduce the attractive teenager. Day in and day out she would try different tactics to gain his attention. Yosef wouldn’t budge, as he knew that adultery was a terrible crime. One day, the Torah says that Yosef went to his house to “do his work”. Some say<sup>3</sup> that this is literal, and he was going to work on some bookkeeping for his master. Others say<sup>4</sup> that this is a euphemism for him finally caving into Potiphar’s wife’s seduction. However, even according to that opinion, Yosef took hold of himself and abstained.

What inspired him to stay on the right path? Our Sages say<sup>5</sup> that a vision of his father Yaakov’s face appeared to him in the window. Yaakov exclaimed: “Yosef! Your brothers are destined to have their names engraved in the stones of the Kohen Gadol’s *Eiphod*, and you’ll be among them! You want your name to be erased from amongst your brothers?” The Sages cite as an allusion to this vision a verse in Proverbs: “Someone who accompanies harlots will lose הוֹן, wealth<sup>6</sup>.” This is very interesting, but the prooftext seems rather odd. Where did our Sages see from the word הוֹן an allusion to losing one’s name on the *Eiphod*?

Another teaching of our Sages<sup>7</sup> is that since Yosef sanctified G-d’s name in private, the letter ה was added to Yosef’s, becoming יהוסף. As well, we are told<sup>8</sup> that the twelve stones on the Kohen Gadol’s breastplate<sup>9</sup>, which contained the names of the twelve tribes, they also contained the names of Avraham, Yitzchak, Yaakov, and the phrase ישורין שבטי, “the Tribes of Yeshurun”. Now, how were all of these names arranged on the stones?

One suggestion<sup>10</sup> is that every stone contained exactly six letters. To make up the missing letters when the names were shorter, the letters from Avraham, Yitzchak, etc. filled in the place. For example, ראובן also contained the letter א. שמעון also had the letter ב. לוי also had

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<sup>1</sup> Based on Chanukas HaTorah parshas Vayeishev § 41

<sup>2</sup> Genesis 39:11

<sup>3</sup> Either Rav or Shmuel in Sotah 36b says he went to do work, and Targum Onkelos ad. loc. says it was bookkeeping

<sup>4</sup> Rav or Shmuel (the one who argues on the previous opinion), Sotah loc. cit.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid

<sup>6</sup> Proverbs 29:3

<sup>7</sup> Sotah loc. cit.

<sup>8</sup> Yoma 73b

<sup>9</sup> The vision of Yaakov for whatever reason specified the stones of the *Eiphod*, even though in truth the twelve tribes also had their names engraved on the twelve stones of the breastplate. This is probably why the Chanukas HaTorah had no problem mixing together the different teachings, even though one is talking about the *Eiphod* (two stones) and the other the breastplate

<sup>10</sup> Chizkuni to Exodus 28:21

the letters םרה, the three of which together spell Avraham. On Yosef's stone, after יסף came the letters ןו, finishing the word ישורון.

Now we have all we need to understand the intent of our Sages. They saw in the verse about losing הון, wealth, an allusion to Yosef's vision of his father Yaakov. Where did they see it? The word הו"ן contains, first of all, the letter ה which was added to Yosef's name because he refused to sin with Potiphar's wife. Furthermore, besides his name being engraved in the stone, it contained the letters ןו. These three letters together spell הון, the wealth referred to in this verse.

Good Shabbos