

1. Bereishit 47:13-27

(יג) וְלֶחֶם אֵין בְּכֹל הָאָרֶץ כִּי כָבֵד הָרָעַב מְאֹד וַתִּלְהַב אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם וְאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן מִפְּנֵי הָרָעַב: (יד) וַיִּלְקֹט יוֹסֵף אֶת כָּל הַכֶּסֶף הַנִּמְצָא בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם וּבְאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן בִּישְׁבָר אֲשֶׁר הֵם שׁוֹבְרִים וַיָּבֵא יוֹסֵף אֶת הַכֶּסֶף בְּיַתְד בְּיַתְד פְּרֹעָה:  
 (טו) וַיְהִי כִּי נִגְמַר הַכֶּסֶף מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם וּמֵאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן וַיָּבֵאוּ כָל מִצְרַיִם אֶל יוֹסֵף לֵאמֹר הִבֵּנוּ לְךָ אֶת הַכֶּסֶף וַיִּתֵּן יוֹסֵף אֶת הַכֶּסֶף בְּיַתְד בְּיַתְד פְּרֹעָה:  
 (טז) וַיִּתֵּן יוֹסֵף אֶת הַכֶּסֶף בְּיַתְד בְּיַתְד פְּרֹעָה: (יז) וַיָּבֵיאוּ אֶת מִקְנֵיהֶם אֶל יוֹסֵף וַיִּתֵּן יוֹסֵף לָהֶם בְּסוּסִים וּבַמְקָנָה הַצֹּאן וּבַמְקָנָה הַבְּקָר וּבַחֲמֹרִים וַיִּגְדְּלֵם בְּלֶחֶם בְּכָל מִקְנֵיהֶם בַּשָּׁנָה הַהִיא:  
 (יח) וַתִּתֵּם הַשָּׁנָה הַהִיא וַיָּבֵאוּ אֵלָיו בַּשָּׁנָה הַשְּׁנִיָּה וַיֹּאמְרוּ לוֹ לֹא נִכְחַד מֵאַדְנֵי כִּי אִם תֵּם הַכֶּסֶף וּמִקְנֵה הַבְּהֵמָה אֵל אֲדֹנָי לֹא נִשְׂאָר לִפְנֵי אֲדֹנָי בְּלִתי אִם גּוֹיַתְנוּ וְאַדְמֹתְנוּ: (יט) לָמָּה נָמוּת לְעֵינֶיךָ גַּם אֲנַחְנוּ גַּם אֲדָמֹתְנוּ קָנָה אֲתָנוּ וְאֵת אֲדָמֹתְנוּ בְּלֶחֶם וְנִהְיֶה אֲנַחְנוּ וְאַדְמֹתְנוּ עֲבָדִים לְפָרְעָה וְתָן זֶרַע וְנִהְיֶה וְלֹא נָמוּת וְהָאֲדָמָה לֹא תִשָּׁם: (כ) וַיִּקֶן יוֹסֵף אֶת כָּל אֲדָמַת מִצְרַיִם לְפָרְעָה כִּי מָכְרוּ מִצְרַיִם אִישׁ שְׂדֵהוּ כִּי חֹזֵק עֲלֵהֶם הָרָעַב וַתְּהִי הָאָרֶץ לְפָרְעָה: (כא) וְאֵת הָעָם הָעֵבְרִי אֲתוֹ לְעָרִים מִקְצֵה גְבוּל מִצְרַיִם וְעַד קֶצֶהוּ: (כב) רַק אֲדָמַת הַכֹּהֲנִים לֹא קָנָה כִּי חֵק לַכֹּהֲנִים מֵאֵת פְּרֹעָה וְאָכְלוּ אֶת חֶקֶם אֲשֶׁר נָתַן לָהֶם פְּרֹעָה עַל כֵּן לֹא מָכְרוּ אֶת אֲדָמָתָם:  
 (כג) וַיֹּאמֶר יוֹסֵף אֶל הָעָם הֵן קָנִיתִי אֶתְכֶם הַיּוֹם וְאֵת אֲדָמַתְכֶם לְפָרְעָה הֵא לָכֶם זֶרַע וַיִּרְעֹתֶם אֶת הָאֲדָמָה: (כד) וְהָיָה בְּתִבּוּאָת וַיִּתְּתֶם חֲמִישִׁית לְפָרְעָה וְאַרְבַּע הִיָּדֹת יִהְיֶה לָכֶם לְזֶרַע הַשָּׂדֶה וְלֹאֲכַלְכֶם וְלֹאֲשֶׁר בְּבֵתֵיכֶם וְלֹאֲכַל לְטֶפְלְכֶם: (כה) וַיֹּאמְרוּ הַחֲיִתִּינּוּ גִמְצָא חֵן בְּעֵינֵי אֲדֹנָי וְהִינּוּ עֲבָדִים לְפָרְעָה:  
 (כו) וַיִּשָּׂם אֹתָהּ יוֹסֵף חֹזֵק עַד הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה עַל אֲדָמַת מִצְרַיִם לְפָרְעָה לְחֹמֶשׁ רַק אֲדָמַת הַכֹּהֲנִים לְבָדָם לֹא הָיְתָה לְפָרְעָה: (כז) וַיָּשֶׁב יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם בְּאֶרֶץ גֹּשֶׁן וַיִּצְחַזְזוּ בָּהּ וַיִּרְבוּ וַיִּרְבּוּ מְאֹד:

13And there was no food throughout the land, for the famine was heavy in the land. And the land of Egypt and the land of Canaan were distraught from the famine. And Yosef gathered all of the money found in the land of Egypt and in the land of Canaan, for the food they purchased, and Yosef brought the money to Pharaoh's house.

15And all of the money of the land of Egypt and the land of Canaan was finished. And all of Egypt came to Yosef saying, "Give us food; why should we die before you, for no money remains?" And Yosef said, "Give your cattle and I will give you for your cattle, if no money remains." And they brought their cattle to Yosef, and Yosef gave them food for horses and sheep and cattle and donkeys, and he led them with food for their cattle that year.

18And that year ended, and they came to him in the second year and they said to him, "We will not hide from our master that the money and cattle are all gone, to our master. Nothing remains before our master, but our bodies and our land. Why should we die before your eyes, us and our land? Purchase us and our land for food, and we and our land shall be slaves of Pharaoh, and give us seed and we will live and not die, and the land will not be ruined." And Yosef acquired all of the land of Egypt for Pharaoh, for the Egyptians, each one sold his field, for the famine had overpowered them. And the land belonged to Pharaoh. And he moved the nation into cities (or "by cities"), from one end of Egypt's border to the other. Only, the land of the priests did he not purchase, for a portion of the priests came from Pharaoh, and they ate their portion which Pharaoh gave them. Therefore, they did not sell their land.

23And Yosef said to the nation, "Behold, I have purchased you and your land for Pharaoh today. Here is seed for you; plant the land. And when there is produce, you shall give one-fifth to Pharaoh, and four-fifths will be for you for seed of the field and for your food and for your households and for your children to eat." And they said, "You have rejuvenated us! Let us find favour in our master's eyes, and we will be slaves to Pharaoh."

26And Yosef made this a law, until today, on the land of Egypt, for Pharaoh, for one-fifth. Only the land of the priests alone did not belong to Pharaoh. And Israel lived in the land of Egypt, in the land of Goshen, and they settled in it, and they multiplied and became very many.

2. Midrash, Bamidbar Rabbah 2:17

"כחול הים" נמשלו ישראל בחול והאומות בסיד שנאמר "והיו עמים משרפות שיד", אם אין אתה נותן חול בסיד אין לו עמידה, כך אם אין ישראל אין האומות יכולים לעמוד. כך אתה מוצא אילולי יוסף היו מצריים אבודים ברעב וכן אילולי דניאל היו חכמי בבל אבודים...  
 "Like the sand of the sea" – Israel is compared to sand, and the nations to lime, as in Yeshayah 33:12, "And the nations will be lime pyres." If you do not add sand to lime, it cannot endure. So the nations cannot endure without Israel. Thus you find that were it not for Yosef, the Egyptians would have been lost to famine, and without Daniel, the sages of Babylon would have been destroyed...

3. Rabbi Shai Held, *Saving and Enslaving: The Complexity of Joseph*

But faithful service to Pharaoh does not necessarily righteousness make. What of Joseph's treatment of the Egyptian people? Joseph does indeed save lives—no small feat in the midst of a widespread famine (42:57). And yet the reader is left to wonder just how many of the steps Joseph takes are really necessary. Feeding the Egyptians is one thing, but

progressively stripping them of everything they have is seemingly another. In what is perhaps another irony, the Israelites themselves will soon find out that being fed by one's owner creates an unhealthy and undignified sense of dependence, keeping one bound to one's oppressor (Exodus 16:2-3).

Assume for a moment that Joseph's actions at the moment of crisis itself are defensible. It is nevertheless difficult to understand why he makes the serfdom of the Egyptians permanent, "to this very day" (Genesis 47:26). When the Torah imagines Israel's life in the land, it prohibits the permanent selling of land (Leviticus 25:23); more generally, biblical texts insist that land is a heritage rather than a commodity to be bought and sold—let alone for all time. Deuteronomy is especially emphatic that, when the people arrive in the land, debt must be "rob[bed] of its tyrannical power" in order to "limit human misery." In particular, slavery must have a built-in limit of six years (Deuteronomy 15:12); permanent enslavement is unthinkable. In other words, the Torah passionately prohibits the Israelites from doing to one another what Joseph does to the Egyptian people as a whole.

#### 4. Rashbam to Bereishit 47:21

העביר אותו לערים - כמו שעשה סנחריב... כדי שלא יטענו כח הזקקה איש איש בארצו לאחר מכירה:

"And he moved the nation into cities" – Like Sancherev did... so that they could not claim a historic hold, each on his own land, after the sale.

#### 5. Rabbeinu Bechaye to Shemot 2:21

מה ראה משה ליטפל ביתרו עובד ע"ג? אלא היה משה בורח מפני פרעה ומתירא ממנו שמא יגלגל עלילות בכל מקום שהוא כדי שיהרגוהו, ועל כן הלך להתחתן עם אחד הכהנים שהם כומרים לע"ג, מפני שהיו כל נכסיהם בני חורין אין למלך עליהם שום נגישה ולא שום תביעה... ומה שבחר יתרו מן הכהנים, מפני שהיו לו בנות רבות, כדי שיעשה לו זו וירצו בו לאלתר ולא ידקדקו עמו...

#### Yosef Advocates Helping the Priests?

#### 6. Midrash Sechel Tov to Bereishit 47:27

למה הסכים יוסף עם פרעה לתת בר לכומרים חנם? לפי...

Why did Yosef agree with Pharaoh, to give the priests food for nothing? Because...

#### 7. Rabbi Yitzchak b'Rabbi Yehudah HaLevi, Paneiach Raza, Parshat Vayigash

והקשה ר"י אורלייני"ש שהרי כתיב כי חוק לכהנים וגו', דמשמע מקודם ולא שפטרן יוסף, וי"ל דה"פ אדמת הכהנים לא קנה כי חוק תקן ועשה הוא לכהנים וגו', שהשתדל הדבר אצל פרעה:

And Rabbi Yaakov of Orleans asked: It is written, "For a portion of the priests came from Pharaoh, etc.," indicating that it was so from before, and not that Yosef exempted them! And one could say that this is what it means: He did not acquire the land of the priests, for he enacted and created a law for the priests, etc. He worked to bring this to Pharaoh.

#### 8. Rabbi Yaakov Tzvi Mecklenburg, HaKtav v'haKabbalah to Bereishit 47:22

ונ"ל שהתכוין בזה תועלת גדולה לבית אביו, כי בהעברת העם לערים עד שלא נשאר אחד בחזקת ארצו, הוציא גם תושבי ארץ גשן לארץ אחרת והושיב שם כל בית אביו, ועדיין היו בית אביו דומים לשאר תושבי המדינה לתת החמישית לפרעה, לכן המציא תחבולה זו שיאכלו הכהנים את חוקם הניתן להם ואדמתם לא תהיה מכורה לפרעה ואין עליהם עול נתינת החמישית, ובזה גם אחיו יהיו חפשים ממש החומש, כי להיותם רועי צאן החשוב מאד בעיני מצרים, להיותם מגדלים הבהמות שהם אלהות שלהם, כמבואר במה שקדם, הם דומים בזה לכהניהם משרתי אלהותם, וכמו שאלו פטורים מתשלומי החומש ככה אלה המקיימים אותם, לכן אמר (פכ"ז) "ויאחזו בה", שהיתה ארץ גשן להם לאחוזוה, שאין מוטל עליה שום מס, הפך שאר תושבי הארץ שלא היתה להם אחוזוה, לכן התחייבו למס החומש.

It appears to me that with this he intended a great benefit for his father's house, for by moving the nation into cities, so that no one remained in possession of his own land, and [Yosef] also removed the residents of Goshen to another land, and put his father's entire house there. And still, his father's house resembled the other residents, giving one-fifth to Pharaoh. Therefore he developed a strategy such that the priests would eat their portion as given to them, and their land would not be sold to Pharaoh, and they would not have the burden of giving one-fifth. Through this, his brothers would also be free of the one-fifth tax, as shepherds of the sheep which were so important to the Egyptians, raising the animals which they worshipped, as has been explained previously, thereby resembling their priests, servants of their god. And just as these were exempt from paying the one-fifth, so too these who sustained them. Therefore it said, "And they settled in it," for Goshen was a portion for them, without any tax on it, the opposite of the other residents who owned no portion and therefore were obligated in the one-fifth tax.

## 9. Targum Yonatan to Bereishit 47:22

לְחַדּוֹ אֶרְעָא דְכוּמְרָנְיָא לָא זָבֵן מִן בְּגִלְל דְחָמוּן לִיה זְכוּתָא בְּזִמְן דְבָעָא רְבוּנֵיהּ לְמַקְטָלֵיהּ וְשִׁינְבוּהֵי מִן דִּין קְטוּל. וְבָרַם אַרוּם חוּלְקָא אָמַר לְמִיתְנַהֲבָא לְהוּם מְלִנוּת פְּרַעָה וְאַקְלִין יַת חוּלְקֵהוּן דִּיהַב לְהוּן פְּרַעָה, בְּגִין כֵּן לָא זָבִינוּ יַת אֶרְעָהוּן:

Only the land of the priests he did not purchase, because he they saw merit for him when his master wished to kill him, and they saved him from execution. But because he said to give them a portion from Pharaoh, and they ate their portion which Pharaoh gave them, therefore they did not sell their land.

## 10. Midrash, Bereishit Rabbah 39:12

אמר: יעקב בירך את פרעה שנאמר ויברך יעקב את פרעה, יוסף גילה לו, דניאל גילה לנבוכדנצר אף אני כן ויגד לאסתר המלכה [Mordechai] said: Yaakov blessed Pharaoh as in Bereishit 47:7, "And Yaakov blessed Pharaoh". Yosef revealed to him. Daniel revealed to Nevuchadnezzar. I will do likewise. Esther 2:22 says, "And he told Queen Esther."

### What Should We Learn?

#### 11. Rabbi Yeshayah Horowitz, Sh'lah Derech Chaim Tochachat Musar on Vayeshev-Miketz-Vayigash #80

צריך אדם שלא להיות כפוי טובה, וישלם טובה תחת טובה אפילו לגוי. הכומרים של מצרים עשו טובה ליוסף...

One must not deny good, and one should repay good for good, including to a non-Jew. The Egyptian priests aided Yosef...

#### 12. Rabbi Yehudah heChasid, Sefer Chasidim 293

"רק אדמת הכהנים לבדם לא היתה לפרעה" (בראשית מ"ז כ"ו) למה הוצרך זה לכתוב בתורה? אלא לומר לך אם המלך מטיל מס על העיר, בני העיר יתנו ות"ה שעוסקים בתורה יומם ולילה לא יתנו עמם דבר, כי לא בעבורם הוטל על העיר אלא בעון עמי הארץ, ותורת אלקים משמרתם. הנה פרעה לכהנים לע"א עשה טובה, וכל שכן עבדי ד' שיהיו ישראל מספיקים כל צרכיהם...

"Only the land of the priests alone did not belong to Pharaoh" – Why was it necessary to record this in the Torah? To teach you: if a king taxes a city, the residents shall give, but *talmidei chachamim* who are involved in Torah day and night shall not give anything with them, for this was imposed on the city not due to them, but due to the sins of the masses, and the Torah of their Gd protects them. Pharaoh benefited priests of idolatry, how much more so the servants of Gd, Israel should provide all of their needs...

#### 13. Rabbi Yitzchak b'Rabbi Yehudah HaLevi, Paneiach Raza, Parshat Vayigash

רק אדמת הכהנים, פי' רי"ח דנכתב זה ללמוד שלא יהיו בני ישראל צרי עין מליתן תרומות ומעשרות וכל המתנות:

"Only the land of the priests" – Ri"ach explained that this was written so that we would learn that Israel should not be stingy, avoiding giving terumot and maasrot and all of the gifts.

#### 14. Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, Commentary to Bereishit 47:22, Haberman tr.

Here we see the exact opposite of that hypothesis regarding "Moshe's mission," whereby Moshe allegedly learned his political and religious "wisdom" from the Egyptians. Here we see that Moshe's supposed teachers, the Egyptian priests, were landowners; moreover, after the change in Yosef's time, they were the sole true landowners; in addition, they had a fixed state income. Our כהנים, by contrast, were landless, and they had no assured income from state funds. Their whole existence depended on the goodwill and respect of private individuals. Had משה רבינו ע"ה been as imagined by the authors of the aforementioned hypothesis, he surely would have made other arrangements for his own tribe!

#### 15. Rabbi Shalom Carmy, *Is Contemporary Orthodox Judaism Racist?*, Tradition 50:4 (2018)

I have written in these pages of my childhood at 715 Saint Marks Avenue in Brooklyn. Only a few years later, by the '60s and early '70s, one visited the family still there with trepidation—more than once a bottle whizzed past the visitor's ear and shattered on the pavement, accompanied by the hurler's hearty advice that Jews get off his turf. One of my aunts was forced to flee three times in twenty years. My mother bore the marks of several beatings. Can you imagine such experiences not engendering resentment and bitterness among the victims and those who absorbed indirectly what they suffered?... The old abandoned Jews of whom I speak, quite a few of them refugees of European persecution, felt their oppression in its most proximate and visible form. The American scene was rife with prejudice which, once confirmed by experience, was not easily set aside. They did not have the knack of protesting attractively by chanting and shimmying in the approved manner. But in their helplessness, under their breaths, they knew how to curse...

## 16. Review Questions

- Give three reasons showing Yosef's policies were good for Egypt, and three reasons showing Yosef's policies were bad for Egypt.
- How could we read Bereishit 47:22 as saying that Yosef was behind the policy of aiding the priests?
- What are three possible motivations underlying Yosef's aid for the priests?
- What two lessons might we learn from Yosef's actions?
- What two lessons might we learn from the policy of leaving the priests their land?