

Torah Talk—מאמרי תורה



The Parasha Letter of The Jewish Primary Day School of the Nation's Capital

Parashat Miketz
December 12, 2015

פרשת מקץ
ל' בכסלו תשע"ו

Torah Reading: *Bereshit* (Genesis) 41:1-44:17
Rosh Chodesh: Bemidbar (Numbers) 28:9-15
Chanukah: Bemidbar (Numbers) 7:42-47

(Note: The very uncommon phenomenon of taking out three Torah will occur this Shabbat. One Torah is for the regular parasha, one Torah is for Rosh Chodesh Tevet, and the third Torah is for Chanukah.)

In this *parasha*, Yosef interprets Pharaoh's dreams and is appointed to implement Egypt's anti-famine plan, which brings him into contact with his brothers again, as they come to Egypt to buy food.

Within three verses, we encounter two different cases of *hapax legomenon*, a word which occurs only once within a written context – in this case, the entire Torah. The first example is in chapter 41, verse 43, while Pharaoh is honoring Yosef: "וַיִּרְכַּב אֹתוֹ, – בְּמִרְכָּבֹת הַמִּשְׁנָה אֲשֶׁר-לוֹ, וַיִּקְרְאוּ לְפָנָיו, אַבְרָחָ; וְנָתַן אֹתוֹ, עַל כָּל-אֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם." "And he made him ride in the second chariot which he had; and they cried before him: 'Abrech'; and he set him over all the land of Egypt."

The second occurs two verses later: "וַיִּקְרָא פְרַעֲהַ שֵׁם-יוֹסֵף, צַפְנַת פַּעֲנַח, וַיִּתֵּן-לוֹ אֶת- – אֲסַנַּת בֵּת-פּוֹטִי פְרַע כַּהֵן אֵן, לְאִשָּׁה; וַיֵּצֵא יוֹסֵף, עַל-אֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם." "And Paro called Yosef's name **Tzaphnat-pane'ach**; and he gave him as a wife Osnat the daughter of Poti-phera priest of On. And Yosef went out over the land of Egypt."

Growing up, "Abrech" was my favorite word in the Torah, as most English *Chumashim* (Bibles) presented it in transliteration rather than translation. Every year, when we

would reach *Parashat Miketz*, my mother z”l would begin giggling, because “Abrech” in Yiddish, loosely translated, means “I will vomit.”

In reality, most commentators believe that “Abrech” is an Egyptian word, but no one is quite sure what it means. Rashi (11th Century Franco-Germany) believes that *rech* in the Aramaic language is “king” and *av* is “father,” so it means that Yosef was like a father to the king. Radak (12th-13th Century Provence), Ibn Ezra (12th Century Spain), and Sforno (16th Century Italy) think it is related to the Hebrew word *berech* meaning “knee” and therefore means “kneel before him.” Rav Saadiah Gaon (9th Century Babylonia) says that it means “honored prince of impeccable character.” Everett Fox (20th Century USA) translates it as “attention!”

Similarly, no one is sure of the origin of the name *Tzaphnat-pane’ach*, although most commentators concede that it is of Egyptian derivation. The one major exception is Ramban (13th Century Spain/Palestine), who says that Paro spoke Hebrew, and so gave Yosef a royal title in his native language meaning “the secrets are revealed.” Rashi and Rav Saadiah Gaon claim it is Egyptian for “he who explains or reveals the hidden.” Fox translates it as “the God speaks and he lives.” Many English versions of the Bible, such as the Hertz *Chumash*, do not translate it at all, but explain in the notes that it means “food-man of the life.”

As there are no other words in the Torah to compare these words to, their actual meanings are lost in antiquity and open to interpretation. Whatever they mean, contextually, they indicate some sort of great honor for Yosef who was being raised to be second in command of all Egypt.

Shabbat Shalom and Happy Chanukah.

For Discussion:

- What do you think the two phrases mean? Which interpretation resonates with you the most? Why?
- How do you think Yosef felt while he was riding in the chariot before all of Egypt? In your opinion, what was he thinking at that time?
- Discuss other people either in the Torah or in world history who have had their names changed when they assumed leadership. Why do you think this is done?