

What Do The Dreams of Yosef Really Mean?

WE CANNOT PRESUME to know the meaning of the dreams in the dream cycle in the Yosef narrative; if we could, we might be interpreters of dreams or perhaps second in command to Paroh. We can however attempt to ascertain the literary meaning of the dreams in their narrative context and assume that they have and will continue to have multiple levels of meaning. It may be that it is not the dreams that are significant but their interpretations, and the act of interpretation is their true interpretation. I do not mean this in the sense of the Midrash (*Berakhot* 55b) that dreams are determined by their interpretation; rather that here the *initiative of interpretation* causes them to be fulfilled and *that* comes to be self-referentially their true content. Yosef, “the master of dreams” (Gen. 37:19), never interpreted his own dreams (though he chose to tell them over); his father and his brothers did that for him (ויאמרו לו אחיו המלך תמלך עלינו אם משול תמשל בנו ויגער בו אביו ויאמר לו מה (החלום הזה אשר חלמת הבוא נבוא אני ואמך ואחידך להשתחות לך ארצה). His brothers interpreted his dreams (in retrospect, accurately), but it was their attempts to prevent them that brought them to fulfillment. (If, as the Midrash says, interpretation determines a dream’s meaning, it is *they* who called it and created that outcome). In narrative context their attempt to *prevent* an interpretation *they* had given caused them to come true. Had they simply thanked him for sharing his dreams and wished him a nice day, the story would have turned out very differently or not at all. Reactions to dreams, not the dreams, move the story along.

We might say the dreams Yosef interpreted, as opposed to those he dreamt himself were for the most part about Yosef. (Abravanel notes that when Yosef sees his brothers come to Egypt for food he remembers his dreams: “ויזכר יוסף את החלמות אשר חלם להם” (Rashi reads it as “עליהם”): he realizes his

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own dreams were never for him, but for them.) The dreams Yosef is called upon to explain might describe his destiny or role. It is not so much a series of dreams as much as a series of three sets of *interpretations* which reciprocally interpret each other. The interpretations move the narrative along and themselves cause the dreams' fulfillment.

Chiastic Reversal as Subtext

We may find clues that as Yosef comes to power, the final pair of dream, Paroh's, may refer to Yosef rather than Paroh (as do the modalities of the butler and baker's dreams). To paraphrase Rashi in another context: "הדברים מגיעין ליוסף".¹ Paroh and Yosef have equally strange dreams about grain and harvest, introduced in the same opposed wordplay. The first half of the Yosef narrative's opening verse (37:2) "היה רעה את אחיו" opposes its second half, "ויבא יוסף את דבתם רעה אל אביהם", to describe his complex relationship with his brothers.² Paroh's dream similarly opposes seven *grazing* cows in plenty (ותרעינה באחר) to seven *bad-looking* cows (רעות מארה). And "היה רעה את אחיו" ("he *shepherded* with his *brothers*") is reciprocally mirrored in sound and meaning in Paroh's "ותרעינה באחר" ("they *grazed* in *brotherhood*").³ Does this create equation between their dreams?

What may be most significant is an unnoticed and striking layer of signification in Paroh's dreams, discerned when we read their experience and narration as a composite.⁴ In the dream seven good-looking cows come up from the river:

"והנה מן היאר עלת שבע פרות יפות ומראה ובריאת בשר ותרעינה באחר" (41:2)

Paroh however reports this to Yosef as:

"והנה מן היאר עלת שבע פרות בריאות בשר ויפת תאר ותרעינה באחר" (41:18)

This gives us a composite chiastic series:

יפות מראה ובריאת בשר \ \ בריאות בשר ויפת תאר

or:

X^1 בריאות בשר \ \ ובריאת בשר X^2

where X^1 equals = יפות מראה and X^2 equals = יפת תאר, as a composite descriptive pair:

יפות מראה \ \ ויפת תאר

Only two people in the Torah are described as: "יפה תאר ויפה מראה", Yosef (39:6), and his mother, Rachel: "ורחל היתה יפה תאר ויפה מראה" (29:17).

In the larger scheme of things the dreams' content might have very little to do with the Egyptian economy but portend far larger issues. All the dreams

connect bread and power (in the relationship throughout of לחם \ חלם), but these might closely connect to Yosef, the dreams' interpreter.) And in a darker sense they may well refer to Rachel herself, as will be noted.)

The reversal is confirmed in *Midrash Tanhuma/Midrash Yelamdeinu, Miketz 3*:

אמר פרעה: "חלום חלמתי". כשבא לומר לו את החלום בקש לבדוקו והיה מהפך
 לו את החלום. אמר ליה, "והנה מן היאר עולות שבע פרות בריאות בשר ויפות תאר".
 אמר ליה לא כך ראית אלא: "יפות מראה ובריאת בשר". . . .
 הוא שאביו מברכו "בן פורת יוסף" (מט,כב). אל תקרא: "בן פורת", אלא
 "בין הפרות יוסף".

"Paroh said, "I dreamt a dream".

When he came to tell him the dream he wished to test him and reversed the dream for him.

He said to him, "From the river seven rose seven cows healthy of flesh and beautiful of form."

Said Yosef to him, "Not so you saw, but, "beautiful of appearance and healthy of flesh". . . .

That is what his father blessed him: "בן פורת יוסף" (49:22):

Do not read "בן פורת" ["Yosef is son of the vine"] but "בין הפרות יוסף" ["Yosef is son of the cows"]."⁵

In the metathetic letter reversal of "בן פורת יוסף" as "בן פרות יוסף", describing *his* reversal, we hear also that of *Agadat Bereishit 23*: "בן פורת יוסף": Yosef who *interprets*, connecting the *cows* (פרות) and *solutions* (פורת).

R. Saadia Gaon in his Commentary to Prov. 1:6 ("להבין משל ומליצה") suggests that *inverting* a metaphor's terms can decode it, citing as example Paroh's dreams whose meaning becomes apparent when their elements are combined and inverted. In the natural order of things skinny cows do not eat fat cows nor do skinny stalks eat fat stalks. But in inverting the terms, fat cows could eat fat stalks and skinny cows could eat skinny stalks. Yosef rearranges them: "The seven *good cows* . . . and seven *good stalks* are seven years . . . and the seven *thin cows* . . . and the seven *thin stalks* . . . will be the years of hunger," (41:26-27). A seven-times series in combinatorial inversion gives us its meaning as one dream (41:26) (though even a less radical reading could give us at least seven good plowings and seven bad ones⁶).

And here may be the significance. In Gen. 39:6 we read: "And he [his master] left all that was his in Yosef's hand and he knew of nothing with him but the bread he ate"), and then: ויהי יוסף יפה תאר ויפה מראה

Rashi comments on ויפה תאר ויפה מראה:

"כיון שראה עצמו מושל התחיל אוכל ושותה ומסלסל בשערו"

“Since he saw himself ruling [paraphrasing: “And he left all that was his in Yosef’s hand and knew of nothing with him . . .”] he began to *eat and drink and curl his hair*.”

How is Rashi translating “ויהי”? Clearly as: “*became*”. In sequence, Yosef seeing his rise to power, *became* מראה ויפה תאר ויפה, began to take better care of himself. And certainly the syntax of ויהי יוסף יפה תאר ויפה מראה is mainline and sequential as a progressive series of events and not off-line as flashback or anterior information.⁷ A simple comparison with (Gen. 29:17) ועיני לאה (ורחל ורחל היתה יפה תאר ויפה מראה) reveals this, where it is semantically non-sequential and syntactically pluperfect, past-perfective.⁸

Yosef’s verse contains the relationship of bread and power where his first two dreams bring him to power over *all but* the bread, as the next dreams will give him power over everything, *particularly* the Egyptian bread. But the description of the rise to power (ויעזב כל אשר לו ביד יוסף) can also darkly foreshadow its loss (ויעזב בגדו בידה וינס ויצא) and ensuing trouble.

(Why does Rashi read *becoming* “יפה תאר ויפה מראה”, as “התחיל אוכל ושותה”, as “ומסלסל בשערו”?)⁹ It appears to be based on his previous comments to Gen. 29:17 (ורחל היתה יפה תאר ויפה מראה):

“תאר” הוא צורת הפרצוף, לשון: “יתארהו בשרד” (ישעיה מד, יג). “מראה”: הוא זיו קלסתר

There, dealing with the question as to the difference between the two terms (“תאר”, “מראה”), he shows that “תאר” is “*structural*” (citing Isa. 44:13: “he forms it with a tool”), and “מראה” is “*cosmetic*”, surface appearance. So Yosef in becoming “יפה תאר ויפה מראה”, becomes *structurally* nicer-looking (more filled-out: he starts to eat better) and starts to comb his hair (cosmetic).

As to the *interpretive* significance for the dream: if Yosef *became* “יפה תאר ויפה מראה”, “beautiful of form and beautiful of appearance,” well-fed like the cows of the dream what was he before? Skinny, *not* well-fed.¹⁰ Reading the dreams this way could indicate that while he might go from skinny to well-fed, rising to power, in inversion there is the possibility and danger that he could also become skinny again. What is significant is that *that* possibility should be avoided and could be. *That* modality of option and volition may be at the heart of these dreams and, self-referentially, may be its own truest interpretation. I’ll explain.

Food and Power: Earth/Heaven; Active/Passive

The patterns in the dream pairs interpret each other reciprocally. All are about food and power: The first two dreams (Yosef’s) predict rising to global power through grain.¹¹ The second two (the butler and baker’s) focus on

power, food, and bread to reflect Yosef's own related ascents and descents; Paroh's focus on cycles of plowings and harvests.¹²

The rise to dominion (המלך תמלך עלינו אם משול תמשל בנו), the sun, moon, and stars bowing, as they first rule over heaven and earth (Gen 1:16): . . . מאורות ברקיע בשמים להאיר על הארץ . . . את המאור הגדל לממשלת היום ואת הכוכבים (המאור הקטן לממשלת הלילה ואת הכוכבים) is reflected in earth and heaven. In the first dream, in the field on *earth*, he is active (הנה אנחנו מאלמים אלומים) (בהנה קמה אלמתי וגם נצבה) as is his grain there (בתוך השדה) in his second, in *heaven*, he is entirely passive, bowed to: no verbs are ascribed to him. And as he dreams, his brothers and father interpret for him.

In the second pair of dreams, of the butler and baker, (now others dream and Yosef interprets for them) the first, the butler with the vines, on *earth*, is industriously active. The baker does nothing; no verbs are ascribed to him, as birds from the *heavens* eat the bread in the baskets on his head.¹⁴

Benno Jacob in his commentary on Genesis sees the meaning of their dreams, and Yosef's ability to interpret them, in *their own* evident self-perceptions. The same active/passive construct emerges. If the officer of the wine-pouring perceives himself as industriously doing his job, squeezing grapes, pouring wine into Paroh's cup and placing it before him, then that is what the dream means. If the baker sees himself as verbless, lazy (he did not bake the bread nor even thought to cover it), a passive victim, then that is what it means.¹⁵ (Significantly, there is thus *no symbolism or metaphor* in the dreams or their interpretation. That the dreams may be at face value *non-metaphorical* will be crucial in interpreting all of them.)

It appears that their dreams have little to do with their dreamers themselves, they are simple and unfortunately caught in the line of fire. Their dreams are about and meant for Yosef, containing the options of industriously actively using power to feed and help, or passively to be bowed to and face calamity. And the constructs of the butler and baker's liberation or imprisonment are connected with his own choices. After his second dream Yosef quickly found himself in a pit, the "בור", and sold into slavery. Being bowed to by celestial bodies did not help him any more than the Royal Baker's high position helped him. Then after industriously rising to power in Potiphar's house he tells Potiphar's wife (after eating well and curling his hair) that "אננו גדול בבית הזה ממני" (39:9), only to quickly find himself in a "בור" again. The Torah calls the jail a "בית הסוהר" (39:20-23, 40:3;5) or a "משמר" (40:3;7; 41:10) but Yosef calls it a "בור" (40:15). He knows a "בור" when he sees one; he's been there, and in the end it is from a "בור" that he is taken out (41:14).

The passive/active modality and the *option* to act is now at the heart of reciprocal interpretative potential. Yosef can and will correct his former prideful inactivity and attempt to cheer up his cell-mates and attribute all dream interpretation to God, before them and Paroh. His dreams were *active* and *passive* respectively, as are the butler and baker's pair of dreams. Before, in passivity his dreams were interpreted; now he interprets for others. In doing so he moves from *passive to active* to mirror and reverse the serial sequence and *substance* of their dreams and his own.

The Dream As Solution

Here may be the key and the brilliance in interpreting Paroh's dreams. They are in many ways identical to Yosef's own, but the butler and baker's might mediate between them and explain both sets.

Yosef interpreted Paroh's dreams as one dream about seven years of abundance and seven of famine and advised Paroh to put away food from the good years for the bad. Paroh is astounded by Yosef's interpretation and advice and appoints him second in command to administer that initiative. The question is asked from early commentators on.¹⁶ Yosef was brought to interpret Paroh's dreams, not to advise him how to run his economy, an audacious proposal, dangerous enough even if it were not suggested by a young foreigner just out of prison. The obvious necessary idea of putting food by in good times for bad, however brilliant its implementation, is not of itself overly astounding or radical. What makes Yosef's interpretation persuasive to Paroh: how would he know *his* was correct?¹⁷

There is an approach that it is not advice but the interpretation of *the dream* itself which commended Yosef to Paroh. Ramban, for instance, sees the thin cows eating the fat ones as a sign suggesting that the years of hunger could eat those of plenty. It was not advice, he writes, but the dream's interpretation. (See also *HaKetav VeHaKalah*.)

Among contemporary approaches of this line, is that of the Lubavitcher Rebbe and in variants of it, Yonatan Grossman, Meir Speigelman, and I would include Tamir Granot.¹⁸ In the Lubavitcher Rebbe's reading, there is no special brilliance in the obvious advice and it is similarly obvious that seven cows and stalks of grain mean seven years of plenty or hunger without any metaphor or symbolism.¹⁹ Cows and stalks indicate abundance; cows *grazing* would certainly indicate plenty; the sequence of cows followed by grain indicates plowing and harvest cycles.²⁰ Grain coming up seven times, proceeded by cows plowing, as sustenance emerges annually from the Nile that irrigates

Egypt, implies seven yearly plowings and seven harvests: seven good plowings and harvests and seven thin ones. This might be obvious to all.

The central enigmatic difficulty of the dreams for which no one could find a solution was the sight of seven skinny cows *standing next* to seven fat cows: *fourteen* cows stand *simultaneously* not consecutively (41:3). This (like the fourteen stalks) is the dream's unsolvable problem and ultimately its meaning. Any interpretation not taking this into account, even one of seven good years followed consecutively (or even closely) by seven bad years, would not adequately explain the dream.²¹ Yosef therefore posits that this critical element indicates that the reality and specter of seven good and bad years are known to us *now* as coexistent realities. The ominous specter and threat of the seven bad years exists for us in the present in the good years, just as the plenty of the seven good years could exist as solution during the seven bad ones. That we are aware now of the events of the coming fourteen years of itself indicates a need and *solution* of initiative and action. The advice, which is not advice but the dreams' implied interpretation, is the greatest part of its solution and thus its most insistently urgent component of content and meaning.

Yonatan Grossman in this way notes how fourteen side-by-side cows indicate the opportunity for parity between two contemporaneous seven-year sets as the *dreams'* advice.²² He notes 41:53-54's narrative description of *bread* and *famine* existing simultaneously in Egypt:

And the seven years of famine began . . . and in the land of Egypt there was bread. And all of the land of Egypt was hungry and the nation cried to Paroh for bread . . . and Yosef opened all there was for them and fed Egypt . . . and the famine grew stronger in Egypt.

On this line, Meir Spiegelman suggests that since “ותבאנה אל קרבנה” appears in the *cows* dream but *not* in the grain dream, they indicate two alternative options²³ The good years could be devoured and forgotten *or* this catastrophe could be avoided. While this is a very interesting interpretation, I must mention the *Meshekh Hokhmah's* close reading here. Yosef in his overarching solution said: “ועל השנות” ועל החלום אל פרעה פעמים כי נכון הדבר מעם האלקים (cows *and* stalks) to convey that God is making it happen very quickly. Thus, if a detail does *not* repeat itself in both dreams, it will *not* be happening quickly. The detail of abundance disappearing as if it never happened is not repeated because in fact Egypt will not be emptied without a trace for another 210 years when Israel leaves Egypt (“וינצלו את מצרים”, “And they emptied out Egypt”, Ex. 12:36). In a deeper sense, this may be closer to the dreams' ultimate meaning and content.

A Variant: Paroh's and Yosef's Dreams Interpret Each Other

Tamir Granot has a variant.²⁴ The advice isn't imbedded in the dream, yet Yosef's startling interpretation that the dream *has a solution* is an idea unimaginable to Paroh. In the confrontation between his pagan deterministic view of dreams and Yosef's religious one (הלוא לאלקים פתרונים), Paroh simply wants to know what pre-dictated fate is decreed on him: what is he in for? Yosef responds astonishingly that the dream indicates taking action. This is not the dream's interpretation but its *implication*. Yosef interprets not the dream's content but the fact that God has told this to Paroh. Reflecting his move from בעל החלומות as passive dreamer of dreams to active interpreter, Yosef *actively* interprets a reality to mean that *action* should be taken. In the Jewish concept of dreams and prophecy, a prophet's prediction is not to tell the future but to tell us what action and initiative we must take. Ideally, a prophecy by a Jewish prophet should *not* come true if we follow it properly. This *religious* sensibility is astounding to Paroh.²⁵

Granot uses Rabbi Soloveitchik's idea of גורל and יעוד, fate and destiny.²⁶ He does *not* say the advice is imbedded in the dream yet I would include him in this camp. What is significant is that the necessary initiative of Yosef giving advice is conveyed in the dreams' implication. They present an opportunity to help and feed in a position of power which so strongly resembles his own two dreams about power and food, stalks and grain. It would all make sense now. Paroh's dreams become an interpretation or explanation of Yosef's own two dreams which become an interpretation of Paroh's, becoming interpretations of each other. Paroh's dreams now tell Yosef what his meant, what is now demanded of him, the action he must take. (The middle set, the butler and baker's dreams of activity/passivity, power and food, can certainly interpret the other two.) Again, it is not the dream but its interpretation that makes it happen. And the dreams were primarily meant for and about Yosef, not Paroh.

A Combined Approach

We could move beyond this. There are essentially two exegetic approaches to Yosef advising Paroh: either that he initiates this independently *or* that the advice *is the dream's* interpretation. There is a third possibility: that both are true. Yosef *on his own* initiates advice because the dreams interpretively *mean and indicate* that he should initiate advice on his own. And self-referentially the advice he gives is equally true at another level for Paroh: the dreams

mean *Paroh* must take action. In the dreams' inherent options Yosef could elect to come to power as the cows, *יפות מראה \ ויפת תאר*, to feed the hungry (as in the Ramban's version that the good-looking cows could feed the thin years) or he could become skinny again, swallowed up and forgotten. He has been given another chance. That he takes action and initiative, insistently telling Paroh that all is from *Elokim*, and his brothers that he was sent to feed them, shows "כי טוב פתר" (40:16), that he interpreted well and for good.

These are not sets of dreams but of reciprocal interpretations. Interpretation *itself* becomes self-referential: to interpret is to act, which as it turns out is the dreams' actual interpretation. All the dreams were for and about Yosef except perhaps his own, as he discovers in the officers' and Paroh's dreams and as his brothers come to Egypt for food. *His* dreams were for others and all the others were interpretations of this.

Addendum: Rachel

Avivah Zorenberg notes the connection of Rachel to Yosef's dreams, at the core of the dream of the sun and moon, Yaakov scolding: "What is this dream you dream? Shall I and *your mother* . . . come bow down to you?" She comments²⁷: ". . . according to Freud, all dreams contain a spot that defies understanding, that 'reaches into the unknown.' In the midrash, that unfathomable element in the lives of Jacob and Joseph is represented by Rachel, the 'unknown woman' in their narrative." She notes Rachel's Midrashic silence²⁸ (אלם) in the first dream (מאלמים אלמים), Yaakov's refusal to be comforted for Yosef (וימאן) (להתנחם) (36:35) like Rachel's refusal to be comforted for her exiled sons (מאנה להנחם) (Jer.31:17), and more.

We might ask if *Rachel*, the only other one described as *יפת תאר ויפת מראה*, could be connected to *Paroh's* dreams. The textual association of the cows (*יפות מראה \ ויפת תאר*) as *two sets of seven years* plays against and replicates the *two sets of seven years* of Yaakov's labors for Rachel in exile, precisely when she is described as *יפת תאר ויפת מראה* (Gen. 29:17-20). The *second set*, "שבע פרות אחרות" ("seven other cows") (41:3;19), mean *seven other years*, as Yaakov's *second seven years* were "שבע שנים", "seven other years" (29:27;30) (the stalks are not called "אחרות" in the dream or its retelling.)²⁹

Paroh's dreams could be at a darker level about Rachel as paradigm of exile. The dream can portend and enclose the Egyptian exile and redemption that result directly from it just as at the narrative level it *redeems* Yosef while bringing Israel into *slavery*.³⁰

In Hassidic *seforim* Rachel is Exile and for good reason.³¹ Equation of Yaakov's exile and the Egyptian Exile is biblically and Midrashicly well-

attested (*Bereshit Rabah* 70:10; *Eikhah Rabah*, *Petihata* 24; in a Yemenite Midrash (*Torah Sheleimah*, 37:1) Yaakov sees the Laban exile as the one foretold to Avraham). Hoshea 12:13-14 equates Yaakov's labor for Rachel in exile with the Egyptian exile: ויברח יעקב שדה ארם ויעבד ישראל באשה ובאשה שמר ובנביא נשמר (See Radak and Ibn Ezra). Israel's fleeing Egypt (Ex. 14) is almost verbatim that of Yaakov's fleeing Lavan (Gen. 31). And Sharon Rimon reads Paroh's dreams here for which he calls his "חרטומי מצרים" and "חכמים", against Ex. 7-10-12 where again Paroh calls for his "חרטומי מצרים" and "חכמים", and Aharon's snake *swallows* (ויבלע) their snakes to show God's ability to redeem from exile.³²

Before the exile Yaakov asked Yosef him to bury him in Israel though he buried his mother on the road at *Efrat*, "אפרתה" (Gen. 48) (and he blesses *Efraim*, "אפרים", before Menasheh with God's blessing, "הנני מפרך", and Yosef as "בן פורת יוסף" (49:22)). While Abravanel suggests Yaakov sees *Efraim's* name as vindicating the burial at *Efrat*, Yosef's naming his son *Efraim* could at the same time indicate unresolved business (in Avivah Zornberg's terms) about it, just as Rashi comments of Yaakov's request: "וידעתי שיש בלבך עלי". Rashi cites *Bereshit Rabbah* 82:10 that her burial was divinely necessitated that she might ask for mercies as her sons pass there into exile (as Egyptian exile necessitated Yaakov's burial in Israel³³) from Jer. 31:14-17's depiction of Rachel crying for her sons and God comforting her that they will return from exile.

We may note the imagery in Paroh's dream in the verse that follows there (Jer. 31:18): Rachel's sons ("אפרים") are as a young *calf*: מתנודד שמוע שמעתי (אפרים) are as a young *calf*: מתנודד שמוע שמעתי יסרתני ואוסר כעגל לא למד \ אפרים (אפרים) based on Yosef's blessing as an *ox*: בכור שורו (Deut. 31:17) and as in: חבור . . . כפרה סרה . . . אפרים מה לי עוד לעצבים (Hos. 4:16-17); or in exchange: ואפרים עגלה מלמדה (10:1).³⁴

Targ. Yonatan (40:12) reads the Butler's redemption as portending the Redemption from Egypt:³⁵

And Yosef said this is the interpretation of the dream: three vines are the three fathers, Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov, *whose children will be enslaved in the future to Egypt . . . and they will be redeemed by three shepherds [Moshe, Aharon, and Miriam]; the cup of Paroh you put in his hand is the bitter cup he will drink in the end, and you, Wine Officer, will receive good reward for the good dream you dreamt: the interpretation of three vines is that in three days you will be redeemed.*

Then as a *continuum* it reads the Baker's dream to reflect not just Egyptian Exile, but *all* subsequent Jewish exiles and subjugation:

And Yosef answered: This is the solution: three baskets are the Three Exiles in which the House of Israel will be subjugated in the future. You, Officer of the Bakers, will receive bad reward for the bad dream you dreamt

The dreams as interpretations will activate a series of meanings or levels of meanings, generic and singular. They will not refer merely to the butler or baker's redemption or subjugation, or by extension to Yosef, even as archetypal first Jewish slave and first slave redeemed, who stands in turn for later enslaved and redeemed slaves in Egypt. Or even for how, in the Targum, *they* come to stand for later exiles and redemptions.

The dreams may stand for all possible exiles and redemptions, collective or personal, and all dreams and all interpretations. In the end we discover perhaps that the act of interpretation may itself be a redemption.

NOTES

1. To 36:10, that Yaakov did not know “שהדברים מגיעין לבלחה”: that the moon in Yosef's dream referred not to his mother Rachel who died, but to her servant Bilhah who raised him.
2. His narrative plot is framed in Yaakov's “הלוא אחיך רעים בשכם” and “היה רעה” “אכלתהו”.
3. Onkelos, Ibn Ezra, Ramban.
4. Talmud Yerushalmi *Pesahim* 10:1 derives the obligation of Four Cups of wine on Pesach from the four-time “כוס פירה” in the *composite* of the butler's dream with Yosef's interpretation.
5. “Yosef son of cows”: see also *Bereshit Rabbah* 78:10; 98:18; 99:12.
6. Ramban; Abravanel; *Akeidat Yitshak*; *Bereshit Rabati* of R. Moshe HaDarshan; *Midrash HaGadol* 41:12, etc.
7. Connecting *ויחי יוסף יפה תאר* with the *preceding* rise to power does not contradict the approach that it sets the stage for the *ensuing* incident with Potiphar's wife (Ramban, Seforno), and in fact supports it, as Rashi points out himself.
8. Or at the very least not on the narrative mainline. As pluperfect anteriority, or simultaneity *and* contrast, *ויניי לאה רכות ורחל היתה יפת תאר* seems to mean: “The eyes of Leah were soft *while* Rachel *was* beautiful of form and appearance”. Rashi to Gen. 4:1 reads an inverted verb form (והאדם ידע) (*x-qatal*: subject//verb) as past-perfective, since as he notes, it would otherwise be: וידע האדם (*wayiqtol*: verb//subject). But perhaps he is only demonstrating that the inversion is not mainline, and that past-perfectivity may be *one* alternative in tense or aspect. A. Niccacci, (“Basic Facts and Theory of the Biblical Hebrew Verb System in Prose”, *Narrative Syntax and the Hebrew Bible* (1997) 168, *The Syntax of the Verb in Classical Hebrew Prose*, 1990, “Analysis of Biblical Narrative”, *Biblical Hebrew and Discourse Linguistics*, 1994, 189) suggests that inverted verb forms (*x-qatal*, unlike *wayiqtol*)

- might relate to antecedent information (anteriority), but also circumstance, simultaneity, emphasis, or *contrast* (or oral report) as *other* forms of off-line information. See S. Talmon, “Yqtol-Qtl Pattern: “The Presentation of Synchronicity and Simultaneity in Biblical Narrative”, *Scripta Hierosolymitana* 28 (1978), C.H.J. van der Merwe, “An Overview of Hebrew Narrative Syntax, *Narrative Syntax and the Hebrew Bible*”, 6; L. McFall, *The Enigma of the Hebrew Verbal System, Solutions From Ewald to the Present Day*, Sheffield, 1982. Similarly Rabbanit Zahavah Hazan-Assiag (in Rabbi Yehudah Kuperman’s *Peshuto shel Mikra*, vol. II, 47) cites several cases of *vav-x-qatal* as *contrast*: Gen. 4:14-15; Gen. 5:8 (see Ramban there), Ex.19:3 (see Seforno there), II Sam. 1:22). See also *Or HaHayim*, Gen 14:17-18 and Nechama Leibowitz, *Studies in Genesis*, 131-132.
9. From the *Tanhuma*; he does not cite the *Gen. Rabah* version which omits “מסלסל בשער”.
 10. In fact, as Seforno notes, a very skinny overworked slave.
 11. Ramban, Radak.
 12. Ramban, Abravanel.
 13. R. Elhanan Samet notes how the dream’s three scenes (הנה אנחנו מאלמים אלמים) describe three periods, one when he is together with his brothers; one when he rises to power by himself; and one when he is rejoined by his brothers.
 14. In the dreams as a turning-point for Yosef the content of *vines* and *bread* connect *dreaming* and *interpretation*. The butler dream’s *vines* play on Yosef as: “בן פורת יוסף” (49:22) “son of *vines*” (Onkelos, Targum Yonatan, Ibn Ezra, Seforno), reversed in *Agadat Bereshit* 23 as “בן פותר יוסף”, son who *interprets*. The baskets, “שלשה סלי חרי”, of *bread* (לחם) in the baker’s *dream* (לחם) which he tells Yosef because he *interpreted* well: “כי טוב פתר” (40:16) are in the Targ. Yerushalmi: “תלתא סלין דרפתא”, reversing רפתא=*bread* and פתר, *interpreting*.
 15. This may be already be foreshadowed in 40:1: ויהי אחר הדברים האלה חטאו משקה: מלך מצרים והאפה לאדניוהם למלך מצרים. While מלך מצרים is understood as a (pivotal) double modificant, it reads literally as: the *one who pours for the king of Egypt* and the baker . . . ” Whose baker? Of what? For whom? Here is his dream. He’s in trouble.
 16. *Ramban; Abravanel; Alshikh, Kli Yakar; Or HaHayim, etc.*
 17. *Akedat Yitshak; Abravanel.*
 18. *Likutei Sihot* Vol. 15.
 19. While *Abravanel* and *Akedat Yitzchak* see Yosef’s innovation in interpreting literally, the Lubavitcher Rebbe questions if in *peshuto shel Mikra* any biblical dream until now has been anything but plainly literal and non-metaphoric.
 20. *Bereshit Rabati* of R. Moshe HaDarshan; *Midrash HaGadol* 41:12.
 21. Ramban.
 22. “פתרון חלום פרעה”.
 23. “על חלומות פתרונו”.
 24. “פתרון חלומות פרעה”; “תפקידי החלומות בספורי יוסף”.
 25. I think there is a religious subtext here. Paroh’s dreams are entirely composed of his deities himself, the river, cows, stalks which are devastated. Yosef comes in and repeatedly attributes everything to *Elokim* until Paroh starts speaking in those terms (41:38;39).
 26. “Kol Dodi Dofek” in *Ish HaEmunah*.

27. From the description of her lecture, "Letter from an Unknown Woman: Joseph's Dream".
28. Bereshit Rabah 73:4; Tanhuma, VaYetsei 6.
29. The second cows and Yaakov's second years are both twice called "שבע (פרות\שנים)" "אחרות" (29:27;30; 41:3;19).
30. *Alshikh* 41:33.
31. *Shem MiShmuel*; *Torah Or*, *Igra DiKalah*, etc.; in *Kabbalah: Pri Ets Hayim*, *Shaar Tikun Chatsot I*, *Shelah*, *VaYetsei*, etc.
32. "האותות והחרטומים".
33. Leibowitz, *Studies in* 541.
34. M. Garsiel, *Biblical Names: A Literary Study of Midrashic Derivations and Puns*; Y. Zakovitch, "על מעמד של הנרדפת והשם הנרדף ביצירת מדרש השמות", שלר"ה, ב.
35. Similarly *Bereshit Rabah* 88:4.