

Keter Al HaTorah, Bereishit 47:1-27

In the final pesukim of perek 46, Yosef coached his brothers before their "entry interview" with Pharaoh. Now, in perek 47, the actual meeting is held.

Seeking Approval from Pharaoh

1. Read pasuk 1/א, in which Yosef speaks on his own to Pharaoh. Compare Yosef's words to the words he originally promised to say when he strategized with his brothers in 46: 31-32. There are at least two significant differences. What might be the reason(s) for the changes? Each comment below addresses a different change that Yosef made.

Abarbanel: *"Note that while Yosef told his brothers that he would tell Pharaoh, 'my brothers and father's house have come to me,' when he came to Pharaoh, he omitted the word 'אלי'-to me,' lest Pharaoh should suspect that they had come to be supported from the royal treasury. But Yosef emphasized that they had come from the land of Canaan and said, 'and their flocks, and their herds and all that they have, have come,' indicating to him that they were wealthy and in no need of support. Yosef thus changed the wording according to need, from what he told his brothers he wanted to say to Pharaoh, and what he actually said."*

Prof. Nahum Sarna: *'are now in the region of Goshen'- "Joseph had selected this location from the beginning. He now artfully insinuates the name into Pharaoh's mind so as to prepare him for the brothers' formal request and to predispose him in its favor."*

2. Read pesukim 2-4/ד-ב and compare them to 46: 33-34. In what ways do Yosef's brothers deviate from the script he gave them? What motivated these changes?

Netziv: *רָעָה צִאֵן עֲבָדָי = your servants are shepherds-" They had to address the question they were asked and say that they were shepherds, and they did not [also] say 'we were keepers of cattle' [as Yosef had advised,] since according to their answer they were now only shepherds, saying that they had once been owners of cattle was simply boastfulness and protecting their pride, and as it states [in Mishlei,] 'Do not glorify yourself in the presence of a king.'"*

Why did the brothers provide Pharaoh with more information than he requested?

Malbim: *ויאמרו אל פרעה - "They presented [their words] to Pharaoh in a way that would not require Yosef to extract a favor in this matter, but rather [they showed] that anyone coming from another country would have the right to what they wanted. First, they said, 'your servants are shepherds,' and shepherds have the freedom to travel wherever the grazing takes them. And thus, they did not mention that that they were מְקַנְהֵי, which means that they are cattle dealers, because they don't have the same rights as shepherds.... And they also said a second thing to Pharaoh, about something he hadn't asked them- לָגוֹר בְּאֶרֶץ בְּאֵנִי = we have come to live as foreigners in the land.' For they*

had not come to settle, rather to live temporarily since they had no grazing land in Canaan, and this is also the right of all shepherds. And this is what led them to say, 'וְעַתָּה יֵשְׁבוּ נָא עִבְדֶּיךָ בְּאֶרֶץ גֹּשֶׁן' = and now, please let your servants dwell in the land of Goshen,' meaning that they would live there for the moment, until the famine ended. And they asked for something that any person from any land had the right to ask."

Ramban: *כִּי־אֵין מְרֻעָה לְצֹאֲן אֲשֶׁר לַעֲבָדֶיךָ = for there is no grazing for your servants' flocks- "I am perplexed by this claim that they made to him, for in Egypt as well there was no grazing. For the famine in the land of Egypt was just as severe as it was in the land of Canaan, if not worse, since the main decree was upon it. Perhaps they said the land of Canaan because due to the severity of the famine, people [in Canaan] were eating wild vegetation and were not leaving any sustenance for the animals. In Egypt, however, there were provisions by which the people could live, so a small amount of grazing remained. It is [also] possible that there was a small amount of grazing in the marshland due to the canals and reservoirs."*

3. Notice that the words in pasuk 4/ד are found in the Haggadah. In the Haggadah, Chazal cite these words as proof that Yaakov and his sons did not plan to stay in Egypt longer than the time it would take them to ride out the famine.

On the other hand, the brothers' choice of the word לגור can also be considered a conscious or unconscious hint to Hashem's words in Bereishit 15:13. See that pasuk below:

וַיֹּאמֶר לְאַבְרָם יָדַע תְּדַע כִּי־גֵר יִהְיֶה זְרַעְךָ בְּאֶרֶץ לֹא לָהֶם וְעַבְדֻּם וְעָנּוּ אֹתָם אַרְבַּע מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה:

He said to Avram, "Know for sure that your seed will live as foreigners in a land that is not theirs, and will serve them. They will afflict them four hundred years."

R' Zeev Weitman: *"Yaakov originally meant to respond to Yosef's invitation to stay in Egypt during the famine, but God encouraged him to accept Pharaoh's invitation to come and settle there so that God's promise to Abraham in the Covenant Between the Parts could be realized."*

4. Read pesukim 5-6/ו-ה.

A. While the brothers have just finished introducing themselves and answering Pharaoh's questions, to whom does Pharaoh address his response? Why?

Abarbanel: *"Pharaoh did not give his answer to the brothers, but rather, he said to Yosef, 'your father and your brothers have come to you,' as if to say, 'don't say that they have come to find grazing for their cattle, for they have specifically come to you, so that you'll help them and support them through the famine. Therefore, I don't want to give them the area of settlement that they are requesting, but I want you to give it to them, so you can show them your greatness and your strong hand, for the land of Egypt is spread out before you, and you can settle your father and brothers anywhere in the*

land.' And since Yosef only wanted to do this at Pharaoh's insistence, Pharaoh needed to specifically say that the brothers should live in Goshen."

B. Notice that in pasuk ו Pharaoh makes two different offers regarding Yosef's brothers. What were these offers?

What are שרי מקנה?

Prof. Nahum Sarna: וְשָׂרֵי מִקְנֵה עַל־אֲשֶׁר־לִי = *"Sarei mikneh, literally 'officers of cattle,' that is, superintendents of the royal cattle. This office is mentioned frequently in Egyptian inscriptions since the king possessed vast herds of cattle. Ramses III is said to have employed 3,264 men, mostly foreigners, to take care of his herds. The appointment of some of Joseph's brothers to supervise the king's cattle means that they are to be officers of the crown and thus will enjoy legal protection not usually accorded aliens."*

Which of Pharaoh's two offers is Yosef willing to consider for his family and which is he unwilling to consider? Why do you think this is the case?

R' Yitzchak Arama, author of Akeidat Yitzchak: *"He chose for them what is good and upright and hated public office. For there is no doubt that if he had wanted, he could have appointed them to high positions, but he wanted them to say that they had been shepherds from their youth, both they and their fathers...and they could not leave it. The idea was to segregate them from the Egyptians; the shepherds were an abomination to them. This would lead to their being settled in Goshen."*

Prof. Nechama Leibowitz places R' Arama's approach into historical context for us: *"Arama, one of the refugees from the Spanish Expulsion, knew only too well the intrigues and tensions of court life and corruptions of office and regarded the divorcement from this as Yosef's aim."*

Below are two additional explanations for why Yosef did not pursue Pharaoh's offer of public positions for his brothers:

Abarbanel: *"Yosef did not bring his brothers into his sphere of service to the king the way Daniel did for his friends in the court of Bavel...This may have been because the work of herding sheep was precious in their eyes and deemed a worthy pursuit for the tribes of Israel and its leaders, and it was the legacy of their forefathers that had been handed down to them, and Yosef saw that it was not appropriate to change from their practice. Or, he may have been concerned that his brothers, while serving the king, would become jealous of him and try to attain more power than was appropriate. If they had been willing to kill Yosef over the coat their father had made him in his youth, how much more likely it was that they would be jealous of his honor and high office now. For this reason, he kept them away from the kingdom, and was satisfied with personally supporting them during the remaining years of the famine."*

Netziv: *"Yosef contrived matters to achieve the goal that they would dwell apart, even though it involved degrading his family in the eyes of Pharaoh. Everything was worth sacrificing to ensure the preservation of Israel's sanctity."*

Pharaoh Meets Yaakov

5. Read pesukim 7-10/ ז-י.

A. When we studied perek 46, we discussed the approach of R' Zev Weitman regarding the repeated shift between the names Yaakov and Yisrael. According to R' Weitman, Yaakov is the name used to refer to galut, in which cunning is needed to survive the regimes of foreign leaders. Yisrael, however, was the name given to Yaakov when he returned to Eretz Yisrael, and it suggests power, straightforwardness, and the ability to engage in direct confrontations, without needing any trickery. Explain how this approach is consistent with the contents of pesukim 7-10.

R' Weitman also explained to us in perek 46 that Yaakov had received two separate invitations to Egypt. The invitation from Yosef had been understood as an offer to live in the land temporarily, whereas Pharaoh had been extending a permanent invitation. While Yaakov had intended to live in the land briefly with his family, we know that ultimately, he accepts Pharaoh's long-term invitation, because it is part of Hashem's plan for the nation's birth.

B. Notice that Yaakov's meeting with Pharaoh is bookended with the words וַיְבָרֶךְ יַעֲקֹב, but we are not told more specifically what Yaakov said. There are two schools of thought regarding these "brachot." Based on the comments of Rashi and R' Bechayai, below, what are the two ways of interpreting וַיְבָרֶךְ יַעֲקֹב?

Rashi: *"ויברך יעקב AND JACOB BLESSED – this was the greeting of peace, as is usual in the case of all who are granted an interview with kings...; saluer in old French"*

R' Bechayai: *"ויברך יעקב את פרעה, 'Yaakov blessed Pharaoh.' He wished him wealth and success in his position as ruler of a great Empire. This was the customary blessing conferred by elders and pious people who were granted an audience by a king. We find an example of this in Kings I 1,31 where Bat Sheva, David's wife, blesses him in a similar vein, saying: 'may my lord King live forever.' The Torah mentions Yaakov blessing Pharaoh again before he took his leave. Our sages (Tanchuma Nasso 26) say that the blessing consisted of a wish that the river Nile would rise again and irrigate the fields of Egypt."*

C. The conversation between Pharaoh and Yaakov is brief and perplexing. If it is truly no more than an exchange of pleasantries, would the Torah have included it? And yet, its significance is not immediately obvious, prompting Radak to comment, *"I have not found a satisfactory explanation why the Torah had to report something so ordinary."*

How should we understand Pharaoh's question? What prompted him to inquire about Yaakov's age?

Rashbam: *"Pharaoh had thought that Jacob looked exceedingly old and therefore asked, 'How many are the years of your life?' Accordingly, Yaakov answered, 'In fact, my years are few; however, they have been hard years and that is why I look so exceedingly old.'"*

Read the following two comments about Yaakov's reply, each of which seems to have a different purpose. Which of the two comments explains why Yaakov answered in the way that he did?

Da'at Zekeinim, quoting the Midrash: *"As soon as Yaakov had uttered the words that his life compared unfavorably with that of his father and grandfather, G-d told him, 'I have saved you from Esav and Lavan, I restored your daughter Dinah to you, as well as your son Yosef, and you have the nerve to describe your life on earth in negative terms when speaking to Pharaoh? I am now forced to make sure that you did not tell a lie, by shortening your lifespan when compared to that of your father and grandfather. He therefore deducted a year for each of the words in this reply by Yaakov, i.e. 33 words, so that he died at 147 years, 33 years younger than the lifespan of his father who had lived for 180 years.'"*

Netziv: *"My 'successful' days, when I wasn't serving either Lavan or Eisav, were bad ones, and did not even reach the level of success of my fathers' days when they were 'sojourning' in exile. Because Avraham and Yitzchak, when they were living in the lands of the Plishtim, had better days than Yaakov had when he was a free man working for himself. And Yaakov told all of this to Pharaoh to show him that he really was not a man of good fortune, and that any signs of success and attainment that were currently visible to Pharaoh were nothing but the results of Hashem's Providence. And it was this fact—how much the Providence of the God of the Hebrews rests upon His servants—that Yaakov felt compelled to communicate. That there is no concept of 'mazel' influencing the lives of Israel."*

D. Which word in Pharaoh's question to Yaakov seems extraneous? What might be its purpose?

R' Shimshon Raphael Hirsch: *"A head of state's time is very precious. Even in our times, during an official meeting, his limited time only affords him the ability to toss out a few brief, simple questions to his guest. Rarely does a head of state manage to show, with his questions, the level of sensitivity that Pharaoh reveals here. And even more rarely does the guest express, in his brief response, the deep wisdom that Yaakov expressed here."*

When a person counts years, he does not consider individual days. Only the special few value every single day and see each day as a specific mission. A 'real' person does not

live years, but rather days.... Only in a setting in which the Torah takes precedence, and in which man's actions are directed toward and dedicated to serving Hashem, only there can man live 'days.' He will work each day with all his might, without being troubled by what tomorrow is liable to bring. Today has been designated for Hashem and will never be lost. [As Tehillim tells us,] "לִמְנוֹת יָמֵינוּ כֵּן הוֹדַע", = teach us to count our days!

And Pharaoh says the same here: 'How many 'days' have you lived in the years of your life?' By presenting his question thus, he reveals the deep impression that Yaakov has left upon him."

Yosef Supports His Family

6. Read pesukim 11-13/א"י-ג.

A. In pasuk 11/א"י, explain why the expression לַחֵם לְפִי הַטָּף, which literally means, "according to the [number of] children," is unusual. Based on the other words in the pasuk, does it seem necessary? What information is it adding? The comments below offer two contrasting interpretations of Yosef's support:

Rashi: *"לַחֵם לְפִי הַטָּף ACCORDING TO THEIR LITTLE ONES – according to the requirements of all their household."*

R' Eliyahu Mizrachi, in his supercommentary on Rashi's words above: *"[Rashi] added the word 'requirements' and also explained the word טָף as all the members of the household because without adding the word 'requirements' we would understand the pasuk to mean that Yosef gave them loaves of bread according to the number of children in the household, and this is not the intended meaning. Rather, it is that Yosef gave them bread according to the 'requirements' of the children.... Because children have the habit of making any extra bread into crumbs [and wasting it]. So [Rashi] is saying that Yosef supported them even according to the needs of a child who habitually crumbles bread and throws it away, i.e. he supported with an amount that is more than what was needed."*

Seforno: *"לַחֵם לְפִי הַטָּף. Even though Yosef was able to allocate generous rations to the members of his family, he did not show them any preference and treated them based on need, each family according to the number of souls. Our sages have stated that at a time when the general population suffers shortage even those who have ample are supposed to limit themselves."*

B. Notice the stark contrast between the comfortable status of Yaakov's household and the dire straits of the Egyptians. What do you think of this apparent inequality and Yosef's involvement in it?

Read the following Midrash, which examines the effects of Yosef's decision:

Midrash Sechel Tov: *“וַיַּכְלֵל יוֹסֵף אֶת־אָבִיו וְאֶת־אֶחָיו וְאֶת־כָּל־בֵּית אָבִיו = Joseph nourished his father, his brothers, and all his father's household. Yosef gave them food. The foundation of the word כָּלֵל is the word כל, and it is doubled to show that they were supported by the kingdom for free. And all the time that Israel was fruitful and multiplying, their names were listed in the royal palace so that sustenance would be sent to them from the palace according to the number of individuals. And this practice is what the Egyptians referred to [later, in Sefer Shemot,] when they said, 'הֲנִיהָ עַם בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל רַב וְעָצוּם מִמֶּנּוּ' = Behold, the people of the children of Israel are more and mightier than we [can sustain], meaning that the Egyptians had to sell themselves as slaves in order to obtain food, while the Israelites were being fed for free.”*

What are the implications and lessons of this Midrash?

R' Yonatan Grossman notes that Yosef's well-intentioned treatment of his family may have ultimately backfired:

R' Grossman: *“Yosef creates differences in status within Egyptian society: there is the general population which has no land or fixed abode, and the Hebrew family which owns land. Even if it has been decreed that Israel will dwell in a strange land for a lengthy period of time, Yosef insures that the Egyptian masses will not be able to oppress them and may even need them because of their economic power. However, ‘many are the thoughts in a man's heart, but God's counsel is what prevails.’ As is only too familiar to us from Jewish history, it is specifically this preferential economic status that arouses the jealousy of the general population. When Yosef and his generation die out, a new king will arise over Egypt and not only will the differences in status between the Egyptian and Hebrew nation not prevent him from enslaving the latter, but he will in fact succeed in gaining the support of his entire nation in the battle against the Hebrews. The economic issue may even serve as the most convincing argument regarding the danger represented by the Hebrews. (Similar examples are unfortunately found throughout Jewish history- it is sufficient to examine the process which took place in Germany and which led to the most terrible tragedy of our century.)”*

The Famine and the Egyptians

7. Read pesukim 14-17/י"ד-י"ז.

A. What are the two stages of famine relief that are described in these pesukim?

Based on the information in pasuk 17/י"ז, how much relief time does the second set of payments buy the Egyptians?

We know that the famine in Egypt lasted seven years, but there is disagreement about at what point during this period the payments in pesukim 14-17/י"ד-י"ז occurred. See below for two representative examples:

Midrash Sechel Tov: "בשנה ההוא" = during that year- *"This refers to the first year of the famine."*

Seforno: *"בשנה ההיא, after they money had run out, the sixth year of the famine."*

B. Until now, most of our news about the famine has been provided as necessary background information to help us understand Yosef's life: how he rose to power, how he was reunited with his brothers, and how he was able to bring his entire family to Egypt. But almost all the remaining pesukim in our perek report the devastating impact of the famine on the lives of the Egyptians. Why does the Torah provide us with a detailed account of these events?

Ramban: *"The Torah tells this, as well as the conclusion of the entire episode to inform us of Yosef's eminence in wisdom, insight, and knowledge and that he was a trustworthy man who 'brought all of the money into Pharaoh's palace' and did not set up for himself stashes of money and hidden treasures in the land of Egypt or to send to the land of Canaan. Rather, he gave all the money to the king, who trusted him, and he acquired [for the king] all the land and all the bodies [of the Egyptian people who became his slaves.] And in so doing, he also found favor in the eyes of the people, for it is Hashem who brings success to those who fear Him."*

As we read the remaining pesukim in the perek, we will see that Ramban provides further evidence for his positive assessment of Yosef's treatment of the Egyptians.

8. Read pesukim 18-20.

A. What happens to the Egyptians after they sell all their cattle to Yosef-what is the next stage? According to pasuk 18/ח"י, when does this stage of the famine occur?

As we saw in the previous section of pesukim, there is more than one school of thought when it comes to dating the stages of the famine. Pasuk 18 tells us that the Egyptians returned to Yosef in desperation "in the second year." But what is meant by "the second year"? Several calculations appear below:

Rashi: בשנה השנית *IN THE SECOND YEAR – of the famine.*

Chizkuni: *'In the Second Year': "According to the peshat, it was the second year after Yaakov's arrival in Egypt, and this was the fourth year of the famine. For the grain that remained from the years of plenty and the money they possessed last for them for three years, and in the fourth year they handed over their cattle, and in the fifth year their land, in the sixth year they offered themselves [as laborers], and in the seventh year, [Yosef] gave them seed, and they planted, and in the eighth year they gathered grain from the field and the famine ended."*

Seforno: בשנה השנית, *the second year after the money had run out. This was the seventh year of the famine.*

Not surprisingly, each interpretation leads to a different understanding of the two requests that the Egyptian people make in pasuk 19/ט"י when they say,

וְנִהְיֶה אֲנַחְנוּ וְאֶדְמַתְנוּ עֲבָדִים לְפַרְעֹה וְתֵן זֶרַע וְנַחֲיָה וְלֹא נָמוּת וְהָאֲדָמָה לֹא תִשָּׁם:

"and we and our land will be servants to Pharaoh. Give us seed, that we may live, and not die, and that the land will not be desolate."

Based on Rashi's explanation of בשנה השנית, what is confusing or inadequate about the Egyptians' proposed solution to their problem?

Rashi offers a solution that is based on a Tosefta:

Rashi: "GIVE US SEED – to sow in the ground. Although Joseph had said (Genesis 45:6) *"And there are yet five years when there will be no plowing and sowing"*, as soon as Jacob came to Egypt a blessing came with his arrival: they began to sow and the famine came to an end. Thus do we read in the Tosefta of Sotah."

Based on this explanation, however, it is difficult to understand the words in pasuk 20/כ, בְּיָחִזְקָם עֲלֵהֶם הָרָעָב =because the famine was severe on them. (Rashi does not address these words.)

On the other hand, if we follow the explanation that Seforno offers above, the Egyptians expect the famine to end soon. This is also the approach of Shadal, as we can see in his comment below:

Shadal: גם אדמתנו =also our land- *"We don't have seed to plant in the land next year, when there will be no famine, and if we don't plant anything, then the land will be as good as dead."*

B. What is the discrepancy between what the Egyptians offer to sell to Yosef in pasuk 19/ט"י and what he actually purchases in pasuk 20/כ?

Ramban seizes on this discrepancy to highlight Yosef's upright behavior with the Egyptian people. See below:

Ramban: *"The Egyptians offered their bodies to Pharaoh. Yosef likewise said [in pasuk 23/ג', 'Behold I have bought you this day and your land for Pharaoh.' Yet earlier it is stated that: 'Yosef bought all the land of Egypt for Pharaoh.' In other words, only their land! The reason is that they offered themselves as bondmen for the king to use them as he saw fit. But Yosef only wished to buy their land, stipulating that they should be perpetual leaseholders or tenants of Pharaoh. The meaning of verse 20 is that 'Behold I have bought you this day with your land' not as bondmen but as tenants. By rights, the king of the land is entitled to four-fifths and you as tenants to one-fifth. But I will treat you generously and give you the landowner's share and Pharaoh the tenant's share. But you will be bound to the land and not permitted to leave it. That is the meaning of 'let*

us find favor in the eyes of my lord,[in pasuk 25]' that you generously allowed us four-fifths that we may be able to eke a livelihood out of them and be 'bondmen to Pharaoh' as we vowed."

While Ramban believes that the Torah documents Yosef's famine management program to emphasize his wisdom and generosity, we will soon see that others point to additional lessons we can learn from this section.

9. Read pesukim 21-26.

A. After agreeing to buy the Egyptians' land, what does Yosef do to the people in pasuk 21/כא? What would have motivated him to do this – was he acting as a shrewd minister, or did personal interests play a role?

Rashi: וְאֵת הָעָם הָעִבְרִי AND AS FOR THE PEOPLE HE CAUSED THEM TO PASS – Joseph caused them to pass from one city to another city that they might be reminded that they now had no claim to the land. He settled the people of one city in another. There was no need for Scripture to state this except for the purpose of telling you something to Joseph's credit — that he intended thereby to remove a reproach from his brothers because, since the Egyptians were themselves strangers in the various cities where they then dwelt, they could not call them (Joseph's brethren) strangers (Chullin 60b).

Rashbam: He'evir HE REMOVED THE POPULATION TO CITIES "Just as Sennacherib did, as it is written (II Kings 18.32), "[And take you away] to a land like your own." [This was done in order] to ensure that each person would not be able to reclaim his own land through a hazaqah after selling it."

Netziv: וְאֵת הָעָם הָעִבְרִי אוֹתוֹ לְעָרִים "He did this to clear out the land of Goshen. And it is for this reason that this entire episode is recorded in the Torah- to explain the extent to which Yosef tried to ensure that Israel could live alone. And the word "לְעָרִים" means that he did not move individuals to scattered places, rather he moved the population of specific city to a different city, so that each group would not lose their existing communities."

B. In pasuk 22/כב, which group of people is not forced to sell its land to Pharaoh? Why is their situation less dire?

Prof. Nechama Leibowitz writes that that one reason this episode is included in the Torah is to highlight the contrast between the privileges of Egyptian priests and Israelite Kohanim in their respective societies.

Prof. Leibowitz: "Can we not detect here the Torah's pillorying of the so-called justice and equity of Egyptian custom, which left individuals sure of their livelihood, subsidized by Pharaoh with their land intact? Those who had were given more. Or perhaps the Torah recorded it as a contrast to the priestly regulations in Judaism, to enable us to

better appreciate its disinheritance of our priests. Perhaps it is meant to show us that He who delivered us from Egypt forbade us such institutions and abhorred them."

Prof. Leibowitz further explains that the Kohanim and Levi'im were purposely not granted land like the rest of Israel to teach them that *"their needs had been supplied from another source. The Levites had not been chosen in order to enable them to accumulate wealth and exploit their flock,"* but to do the service of Hashem.

R' Yonatan Grossman elaborates on this point, noting that the fact that the Kohanim were not able to settle in one place, put down roots and build homes was because Hashem wanted them to model an experience that sanctified His name: *"The one special tribe which is dedicated to God's service must continue to wander; that tribe must continue to experience the sense of basic dependence on the One who watches over us, who 'opens His hand and satisfies all living things in want'.... It is they who have to remember that their lives hang in the balance. It is they who dare not forget for a moment the Creator and guardian of the Universe."*

C. Notice a few similarities in the language of pesukim 23-24/כד-כג to the language of the pesukim from Megillat Rut, Perek 4, quoted below. Why is the language similar?

(ט) וַיֹּאמֶר בְּעֵז לְזִקְנִים וְכָל־הָעָם עֲדִים אֲתֶם הַיּוֹם כִּי קִנִּיתִי אֶת־כָּל־אֲשֶׁר לְאֵלִימֶלֶךְ וְאֶת כָּל־אֲשֶׁר לְכִלְיוֹן וּמַחְלוֹן מִיַּד נָעֲמִי:

And Boaz said to the elders, and to all the people: 'You are witnesses this day, that I have bought all that was Elimelech's, and all that was Chilion's and Mahlon's, of the hand of Naomi.

(י) וְגַם אֶת־רוּת הַמֹּאבִּיָּה אֲשֶׁת מַחְלוֹן קִנִּיתִי לִי לְאִשָּׁה לְהַקִּים שֵׁם־הַמֵּת עַל־גִּחְלָתוֹ וְלֹא־יִכָּרֵת שֵׁם־הַמֵּת מִעַם אֲחִיו וּמִשְׁעַר מְקוֹמוֹ עֲדִים אֲתֶם הַיּוֹם:

Moreover Ruth the Moabite, the wife of Mahlon, I have acquired to be my wife, to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance, that the name of the dead not be cut off from among his brethren, and from the gate of his place; you are witnesses this day.'

D. Nahum Sarna explains the legal nature of Yosef's statement and places it into an ancient Near Eastern context: *"The state-controlled land is cultivated by the former landowners, who pay a tax of 20 percent of the harvest in return for the privilege and for the seed allotment. Such an interest rate was not considered excessive in the ancient Near East. During the reign of Hammurabi, for instance, the state's share of the harvest from administered fields varied between two-thirds and one-half after the deduction of production expenses. An interest rate of 20 percent on money loans was quite common in Babylon, while the rate for loans of produce was usually 33.3 percent."*

Prof. **Moshe Soller** of Hebrew University similarly suggests that Yosef's tenant farming program was not overly punitive or opportunistic, despite how it seems by today's

standards: "When all the rhetorical declarations are set aside, the net result was a 20 percent flat tax to Pharaoh: (47:20).... Certainly, this is a level of taxation that we would be happy to live with. The Egyptian people remained each on their own land, with their cattle and property; they did not become impoverished slaves of Pharaoh; but only had to pay reasonable taxes to the crown."

On the other hand, **R' Tamir Granot**, at Yeshivat Har Etzion, notes that the 80-20 arrangement is not as generous as it seems: "In truth the real profits were obviously much lower, since a large portion of the produce simply covered the labor expenses and served as the farmers' source of sustenance"

E. We noted earlier that in pasuk 19/ט, the Egyptian people offer to become slaves to the state, but that Yosef only purchases their land. Note what the people say to Yosef in pasuk 25/כה. Why would they have done this?

Malbim: "[The people] said, the fact that we are offering to be slaves is not because we want the land, but because it is a great honor for us to be the king's slaves.

Netziv: וְהָיִינוּ עֲבָדִים לְפָרְעָה - "Then [Pharaoh] would provide for our needs whether the fields yield a lot or a little. But Yosef did not accede to their request.

Israel in Egypt- Disadvantaged Strangers or Privileged Wards of the State?

10. Read pasuk 27/כז.

A. Notice that pasuk 27/כז is similar to a pasuk we find in Parshat Shemot, describing the reality that inspired Pharaoh to enslave B'nei Yisrael:

(ו) וַיָּמָת יוֹסֵף וְכָל־אָחִיו וְכָל הַדּוֹר הַהוּא:

Joseph died, as did all his brothers, and all that generation.

(ז) וּבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל פָּרוּ וַיִּשְׁרְצוּ וַיִּרְבּוּ וַיַּעֲצֻמוּ בְּמֵאֹד מְאֹד וַתִּמְלֵא הָאָרֶץ אֹתָם:

The children of Israel were fruitful, and increased abundantly, and multiplied, and grew exceedingly mighty; and the land was filled with them.

Now reread pasuk 26 in our perek and contrast it with pasuk 27. Notice that each pasuk reflects a completely different reality, both of which existed in Egypt at that time. How do the words וַיִּשְׁבּוּ and וַיַּאֲחֲזוּ in pasuk 27 highlight the contrast between the two scenarios? Notice, also, that the verbs in pasuk 27 document a progression as they describe the transformation of Yaakov's family in Egypt. What is this transformation, and how does it contrast with the experiences of the Egyptian population in pesukim 14-25?

Look back at pesukim 11-13/יג-יא and recall that the Torah sets up a similarly stark juxtaposition as it transitions between the Israelites' situation in pasuk 12/יב and the Egyptians' reality in pasuk 13/יג.

What messages does the Torah wish to convey by building two sets of stark contrasts?

R' Tamir Granot writes that Yosef's gestures toward his family in perek 47- securing Goshen for them and providing them with sufficient nutritional support despite the famine—are the direct (visible) causes of their thriving status at the start of Sefer Shemot. It is for this reason that the language in the pesukim is so similar, with the pasuk in Sefer Shemot adding to the list of verbs that demonstrate Yisrael's growth.

R' Granot: *"The period of famine assumes a significance that usually passes unnoticed: during these years—a period of destitution and distress for the Egyptians—B'nei Yisrael continue to flourish. They possess their portion of land and it becomes their inheritance, at the very same time that the Egyptian citizens lose their possession of the land and become Pharaoh's servants. Thus, their status is greatly upgraded, and they in fact become 'preferred citizens'—like the priests of Egypt, the only ones who own property. The easy conditions and stability also apparently served as a convenient basis for accelerated natural increase, which stands out all the more prominently against the background of Egyptian constriction.... It turns out that the famine in Egypt, thanks to Yosef's astute analysis and planning, is actually a source of blessing for Ya'akov's family; in the wake of this period the family indeed turns into a national group: 'God planned it for the good, in order to bring it about that the lives of many people should be saved.'"*

At the same time, R' Granot observes, the Torah may also be telling this story to highlight the negative consequences that flow from B'nei Yisrael's 'success'. *"The death of both Yosef's Pharaoh and of Yosef himself revealed the situation of B'nei Yisrael in Egypt in all its problematic instability. Some commentators maintain that the throne was ascended not only by a new king, but by a new dynasty... which replaced the Hyksos dynasty that had extended support to Yosef and the children of Israel—apparently because of the Semitic origins of the Hyksos. Whether or not this thesis is correct, the syndrome of the development of hatred that is displayed here is clearly archetypal. B'nei Yisrael are living in a land that is not theirs; they enjoy a relatively high standard of living and special status thanks to the success of someone among them and his connection with the rulers. Nevertheless, the success and status are only external and formal; the moment that the human factors disappear...their success boomerangs and turns into jealousy.... The story of Am Yisrael with Yosef in Egypt is the story of the first Jewish exile, which includes the principal elements of the exiles that were destined to follow."*

R' Zvi Ron, a congregational rabbi in Richmond, Virginia, sees a different connection between Yosef's policies in Egypt and the eventual enslavement of his descendants:

R' Zvi Ron: *"Joseph repeatedly referred to himself as simply an agent bringing about the will of God, specifically that his family be saved from the famine and continue to exist. Joseph did not realize that he was also God's agent in bringing about the affliction of the people of Israel, as well as their eventual salvation. The textual hint that links*

Joseph's policies to the oppression of the Israelites is in the concluding verse to this section: ויפרו וירבו מאד. This verse foreshadows Exodus 1:7. This verse immediately precedes the rise of the new king over Egypt who was concerned that the children of Israel 'Are too many and mighty for us,' motivating him to begin oppression of the Israelites.

The plan of the new Pharaoh could only have been carried out in an environment where the king had a tremendous amount of unchecked power. In fact, it was due to Joseph's clever manipulation of the famine resources and economy that the Pharaoh had just this kind of absolute power, giving a more ominous tone to the description of the Pharaoh as the one who 'knew not Joseph.' This Pharaoh disregarded the crucial fact that it was only because of an Israelite that he now had the political power needed to carry out his scheme against the children of Israel."

B. R' Ron notes that Yosef's role as an agent of God was to further Hashem's promise to Avraham in the Brit Ben HeBetarim. Yosef's actions in Egypt hastened several aspects of Hashem's pledge, including the fulfillment of the words, "*Afterward they shall come out with great substance.*" He cites the following Gemara in this connection:

Pesachim 119a: "*Rav Yehuda said that Shmuel said: Yosef collected all the silver and gold in the world and brought it to Egypt, as it is stated: 'And Yosef collected all the money found in the land of Egypt and in the land of Canaan' (Genesis 47:14). I have derived only that he collected the money that was in the land of Egypt and that was in the Land of Canaan. From where do I derive that he also collected all the money that was in other lands? The verse states 'And all the land came to Egypt to buy food from Yosef, because the famine was sore in all the earth' (Genesis 41:57).*

And when the Jewish people ascended from Egypt, they took this treasure with them, as it is stated: 'They despoiled [וַיִּנְצְלוּ] Egypt' (Exodus 12:36)."

While it does not seem that the Rabbis meant their statements to be literal, what is the message of their words? Is there a broader message to be derived?

C. We noted that in pasuk 27 the word וַיֵּאָחֲזוּ informs us that Yaakov and his sons were able to take possession of Goshen, which was especially remarkable given the fact that most of Egypt's citizenry was relinquishing its land holdings at that time. Being able to own property gave Yaakov's family a measure of security. But R' Hirsch reminds us that there was also a darker side to their acquisition:

R' Hirsch: וַיֵּאָחֲזוּ בה = they took possession of it- *They took hold of the land and became chained to it.... Not far from the 'sweet' feeling of recognition that comes with being permitted to settle [an area] in perpetuity, rests the danger that over time the nation will rebel against its own heritage and become alienated from its great mission."*