

Nature in the Parasha

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Parashat Vayeshev – The Grapevine Dream

As we move deeper into the month of Kislev the images of our dreams become more vivid. *Parashat Vayeshev* includes no less than four dreams, Yosef's two dreams, which caused him to go down into Egypt, and the dream of the baker and the butler, which eventually brought him out of prison. Finally, in the following Parasha Yosef becomes Pharaoh's right-hand man by means of his dream interpretation. A dream can reveal to us our innermost thoughts, our aspirations or our fears (*Babylonian Talmud, Berachot 55b*). A dream can bring us a message of future blessing or of impending doom. A dream can reveal or explain to us thoughts that have not yet congealed in consciousness. The language of dreams follows a language of pictures, rather than one of words. Picture language is the primordial form of human communication. This week's parasha includes a dream interpretation of a grapevine dream. One of the themes in my new book [*The Seven Fruits of the Land of Israel with their Mystical & Medicinal Properties*](#) is the Talmudic interpretation of dreaming of each of the Seven Species. Such a dream is always a good dream. The dream imagery of the beautiful grapes is very rich. It is associated with fertility and redemption. Grapes are so beautiful, delicious and nutritious.

The Jewish People – Hashem's Grapevine

The Jewish people is compared to the grapevine. We, as vines, are vulnerable and delicate. However, just as the humble vines produce sumptuous fruit, so, too, does the Jewish nation bear fruit through our performance of mitzvot and Torah study. The grapevine is the centerpiece of my newest book, where I link each of the Seven Species with one of the seven emotional *sefirot*. Grapes are associated with *Tiferet* – the middle *sefirah* of balance, harmony and beauty. Beauty is in the eye of the beholder. In Hashem's eyes, the Torah and the Jewish people embody the greatest beauty in the world. Therefore, the children of Israel are compared to grapes, and G-d to the owner of the vineyard. "I found Israel like the grapes in the wilderness..." (*Hoshea 9:10*). Malbim explains that when Hashem found Israel, in the desert, they were as dear in His eyes as someone who finds grapes – the most important fruit – in the wilderness, where nothing grows. Just as grapes do not receive grafting, so was Israel in the wilderness pure, holy and careful to avoid immorality. The grapevine, with its beautiful clusters of grapes and foliage, symbolizes the importance of all the different segments of Israel. The children of Israel are like a grapevine. Its branches are the aristocracy, its clusters the scholars, its leaves the common people and its tendrils those in Israel that are void of learning. This is what was meant when word was sent from there, "Let the clusters pray for mercy for the leaves, for were it not for the leaves, the clusters could not exist" (*Babylonian Talmud, Chulin 92a*). The harmony between the Torah scholars and the common people finds its expression in the grapevine, whose leaves cover the fruit clusters, in the same manner that the common people cover and protect the Torah scholars. Grape juice resemble blood. May the recently spilled blood of our righteous Torah scholars help unify our fragmented people!

Dreaming of a Grapevine

Why did the butler deserve a good dream interpretation when he was a wicked person who completely forgot about Yosef as soon as he was released from prison? (*Bereishit* 40:23). Why should he merit a more fortunate interpretation than his poor friend the baker? The answer can be found in the grapevine metaphor about which he dreamed. The Talmud teaches, "He who sees a grapevine laden with fruit in a dream, his wife will never miscarry, as it says, 'Your wife is a fruitful vine...' One who beholds a branch of a grapevine in a dream, should look forward to seeing Mashiach, as it states, 'He shall tie his donkey to a small grapevine, and to a branch of a grapevine, his donkey's foal'" (*Babylonian Talmud, Berachot* 57a). Yosef – the master dreamer and dream interpreter understood right away from the symbolism of the grapevine to interpret the butler's dream for good. Yosef also understood that besides the good message of freedom from prison for the dreamer, the grapevine, in the butlers dream, alluded to the future redemption of the Jewish people.

Talmudic Grape Imagery

Here is the full description of the dream that the butler related to Yosef. "In my dream,' he said, 'there was a grapevine right there in front of me. The vine had three branches. As soon as its buds formed, its blossoms bloomed, and its clusters ripened into grapes. I was holding Pharaoh's wine cup in my hand. I took a cluster of grapes and squeezed the juice into the cup. Then I placed the cup in Pharaoh's hand'" (*Bereishit* 40:10-11). In the Taste of Kabbalah section of my book, I explain how the allegory of the grapevine represents G-d's final goal of Creation. When the grapevine is analogous to the Jewish people, its three branches correspond to our holy fathers, Avraham, Yitzchak and Ya'acov, who fulfilled Hashem's purpose of creation. Therefore, splinters of their souls reincarnate in every generation. The Talmud teaches, "In the vine were three branches..." Rav Chiya ben Abba said in the name of Rav, "These are the three men of excellence that come forth in Israel in every generation..." Rabbi Eliezer said, "The vine' is the world. The 'three branches' are [the patriarchs] Avraham, Yitzchak and Ya'acov. 'It was as though it budded, and its blossoms shot forth' – these are the matriarchs. 'Its clusters brought forth ripe grapes' – these are the tribes." Rabbi Yehoshua said to him, "The vine' is the Torah. The 'three branches' are Moshe, Aharon and Miriam. 'And as it was budding its blossoms shot forth' – these are [the members of] the Sanhedrin." Rabbi Elazar the Modiite said, "The vine' is Jerusalem. The 'three branches' are the Temple, the King and the Kohen Gadol. 'And it was as though it budded, and its blossoms shot forth' – these are the young kohanim. 'Its clusters brought forth ripe grapes' – these are the drink offerings" (*Babylonian Talmud, Chulin* 92a).

The Grapevine of Redemption

In summary the Talmud compares the grapevine to the four main entities of creation:

1. Israel is compared to a grapevine, as it states, "...and on the grapevine there were three branches." These are the three men of excellence that come forth in Israel in every generation. They are the sparks of the three fathers that reincarnate in every generation.
2. The world is compared to a grapevine.
3. The Torah is compared to a grapevine.
4. Jerusalem and the Temple are compared to a grapevine.

All of the four interpretations of the metaphor are interconnected and lead to one another. Hashem created the world for the sake of the Torah and for the sake of the people of Israel (Rashi, *Bereishit* 1:1), who will fulfill the Torah in the world and specifically in the Land of Israel. Hashem renewed the Creation of the world by means of the miracles that took place during the Exodus, in order to free His people Israel to serve Him by keeping the Torah, and its mitzvot. It is impossible to keep all of the Torah on foreign soil, as some mitzvot are dependent on the Land of Israel. G-d, therefore, led us to the Holy Land. We drink four cups of wine during the Seder on the first night of Pesach. The first three cups correspond to the Jewish people, the world, and the Land of Israel respectively. The last cup, which we drink following the Hallel prayer of praise, opens with requesting that Hashem deliver us for the sake of His great name. This cup corresponds to the Torah, for its inner level, without the current spaces between the words, consists of various combinations of the letters of G-d's Holy Names (Rabbi Yitzchak Isaac Chaver, *Yad Mitzrayim* p. 137). Rabbeinu Bachaya also notes that the word *cup* – *cup* is mentioned exactly four times in our parasha corresponding to the four cups at the Pesach Seder. In order to live safely in our land, we – the Jewish people – need to live and keep the Torah & mitzvot here so that we will merit the rebuilding of the Temple in Yerushalayim and our complete redemption. When we grow into becoming the grapevine we are meant to be, this will benefit the entire world and bring about peace and prosperity.

The Rectified Grapevine

The children of Israel are selected to rectify the entire world, which sank into global immorality as a consequence of eating from the forbidden Tree. It is known that the Tree of Knowledge was a grapevine and through eating its fruit all the souls fell into the shells. Corresponding to the 130 years that Adam separated from Chava and spilled seed after eating from the Tree, Ya'acov was 130 years old when he went down to Egypt. For Ya'acov came to rectify Adam by means of his 12 holy tribes – the children of Israel. He therefore went down into Egypt with 70 souls – the numerical value of *yayin* – wine (Rabbi Yitzchak Isaac Chaver, *Beit Olamim* 134b).

The Kuzari compares the prosperity of Israel to a vineyard. In order for the vineyard to flourish, you need first of all the perfect grapevines. These correspond to the Jewish people – the chosen people, who are compared to the perfect seed. In order to produce good grapes you also need proper cultivation – composting, watering, weeding etc. This parallels keeping of the Torah & the mitzvot, including the special mitzvot of the Land. Just as the vineyard will produce the finest most succulent fruits when they grow in their optimal land with the best climatic conditions, so will the people of Israel only fulfill their potential completely when safely rooted in our holy land (*The Kuzari*, 2:11-12). The Ben Ish Chai writes that the three vine branches described in the butler's dream represent the three ingredients necessary to properly perform Hashem's mitzvot. We must dedicate our thought, speech and actions to serve Hashem. If any one of these three elements is lacking, so, too, will our devotion to G-d be lacking. Let us work on balancing the different faculties of our being that were damaged by means of eating from the Tree, in order to grow fully into the holy rectified 'grapevine' we are meant to be!