

**MIDEI CHODESH****B'CHODSHO****BY RABBI SHMUEL GOLDIN**

Faculty, OU Israel

Rabbi Emeritus, Congregation Ahavath
Torah, Englewood NJ

To Dream Possible Dreams: A Chanukah Message

Among the many questions that arise from the story of Yosef, one simple question emerges at the tale's turning point:

Why does Pharaoh believe Yosef?

Deeply disturbed by a set of dreams, the King of Egypt desperately turns to one last source for interpretation. He raises Yosef, a Hebrew slave, from imprisonment and commands him to offer an analysis of the dreams. Yosef predicts seven years of bountiful plenty followed by seven years of devastating famine, and suggests a way to meet the looming challenges. Immediately,

Remembering Chuck z"l

ישראל בן מאיר ז"ל

on his 10th yarhzeit, 29 Kislev
5th night of Chanuka

Sandy Reichman and family

Pharaoh declares, "Could we find another like him [Yosef], a man in whom lies the spirit of God?" Summarily, the King raises Yosef to the position of viceroy, charging him the execution of Yosef's own suggested plan.

Once again, we can only ask: *Why does Pharaoh believe Yosef? Why does the Egyptian King accept, without vacillation, the words of a lowly Hebrew slave as the undeniable truth?*

Our question is compounded by a seemingly superfluous phrase in the text...

Commenting on the Torah's statement that "none could interpret them [the dreams] for Pharaoh," the rabbis explain that numerous interpretations are actually suggested to the king by his advisors, only to be rejected out of hand.

What is it in Yosef's approach, in contrast to all other approaches, that finds favor in Pharaoh's eyes?

This query is far from new, and a variety of answers are proposed by the commentaries.

A puzzling pattern in the text of the Torah itself, however, may provide the most intriguing solution to the riddle of Yosef's believability.

A study of the text surrounding Pharaoh's

dreams reveals a hidden struggle emerging between the king and his advisors. *Pharaoh is intent upon seeing his two dreams as one, while his courtiers insist that they are two separate dreams.*

Consider the textual interplay as the story unfolds:

“And Pharaoh awoke and behold it was *a dream.*”

“And Pharaoh related *his dream* to them (his advisors) but none could *interpret them* to Pharaoh.”¹

“And Pharaoh said to Yosef: ‘I have dreamt *a dream*, but no one can *interpret it.*”

“And Pharaoh said to Yosef, ‘*In my dream* I am standing...”

“And I (Pharaoh) saw *in my dream...*”

Yosef senses Pharaoh’s stubborn conviction that he has dreamt one, unified vision.

Standing before the throne, therefore, with his own fate riding in the balance, Yosef’s first words to the king are: “*Pharaoh’s dream is one...*”

He then repeats, in the very next sentence, “*It is a single dream.*”

Finally, he closes his interpretation with the explanation: “*as for the repetition of the dream to Pharaoh-two times -it is because the matter stands ready before God, and God is hastening to accomplish it.*”

Among all those advising Pharaoh, only Yosef is willing to embrace the king’s conviction that his two dreams are one.

1 *Ibid.*, 41:8.

This willingness, in turn, moves Pharaoh to accept Yosef’s own interpretation of the dreams.

A second question, however, now emerges. Why is Pharaoh so intent upon seeing his dream as a unified whole? What is so frightening about the possibility of two separate dreams?

While the Torah clearly points to Pharaoh’s stubborn insistence on a single vision, the text offers no reason for his point of view.

The answer may lie in the mindset of powerful despots from the time of Pharaoh onward. Deliberately isolated and insulated from surrounding reality, these rulers each insist upon living in a world of their own design.

Within these buffered worlds, nothing is more threatening than complexity.

To the king, existence is painted in black and white: straightforward problems, simple solutions. Whatever Pharaoh desires rules the day. Issues are disposed of through the thrust of the sword, enemies dispatched without much deliberation or hesitation.

Pharaoh is content when he dreams of challenges and responses that are straightforward and clear. Suddenly, however, into Pharaoh’s fantasy world intrudes the possibility of two conflicting dreams. The king is beside himself with



worry; his carefully constructed existence may now be facing complex challenges beyond his control. He turns to his advisers for reassurance, only to find his worst fears underscored. “Two dreams,” they say, “the king has experienced two dreams.”

But then, a lowly Hebrew slave tells the Egyptian King exactly what he desperately wants to hear. “*Pharaoh’s dream is one.*”

Reassured by these words, Pharaoh returns to the uncluttered world of his own making and charges Yosef with the task of dealing with whatever complications may actually arise.

Pharaoh is not the only one, however, who seeks a simplified, unified vision of reality.

This desire apparently seeps down to the lower echelons of the royal household and perhaps to the entire Egyptian population, as a whole.

Earlier in the Yosef story, while Yosef yet languishes in prison, Pharaoh’s imprisoned Butler and Baker declare: “*We have dreamt a dream, and there is no interpreter for it.*”

How telling! Not only two separate dreams; but two dreams experienced by two different people! Yet, the dreamers insist that they have “dreamt a dream”-one dream!

To truly understand the Torah’s message,” however, we must go back even earlier in the Yosef story, to a point when Yosef

still enjoys his status as favorite child in Yaakov’s home. There, Yosef dreams two similar dreams, the content of which he shares with his brothers and father. The Torah clearly introduces the second of these visions with the phrase “and he [Yosef] dreamt *another dream.*” Yosef himself tells his brothers, “Behold, I dreamt *another dream...*”²

Yosef is able to dream two dreams. He is willing to embrace the very complexity that Pharaoh later eschews. This scion of the patriarchal era fully understands that the world is not painted in black and white, but in shades of grey.

Not by chance, the Yosef story and the festival of Chanukah coincide each year. For Chanukah is far from the simple, uni-dimensional occasion of which we first learned as children. Complex challenges are carried by this festival; as we commemorate the Hasmonaean rebellion, a burst of light surrounded by a sea of darkness.

The years leading to the rebellion were marked by deep fracture within the Jewish community. Assimilation into Greek culture had become so rampant that, had Antiochus IV (the Syrian Greek king of the Chanukah story) not provoked the rebellion with his onerous edicts, the Kingdom of Judea might well have been overwhelmed by the powerful tide of Hellenization, ending our story right there.

The years following the rebellion were equally devastating. Defying the law

רפואה שלמה
אפרים אברהם בן רבקה

2 *Ibid.*

prohibiting Kohanim from becoming kings, the Hasmoneans, the heroes of the Chanukah tale, assume the throne and begin a reign increasingly marked by excess and corruption. By the time the Hasmonean Dynasty ends, the last two of its kings, Aristobulus and Hyrcanus, open the door to Roman domination of Judea by inviting that rising power to rule on their dispute over the throne.

Chanukah thus demands that we reflect on our challenges, even as we celebrate our victories; that we recognize both the accomplishments of our era and our unfinished tasks.

On the one hand, we are people blessed. After centuries of wandering, we kindle our Chanukiot in our own land, under our own rule. Our radiant flames proudly illuminate the vast accomplishments of the State of Israel and herald the prospect of burgeoning peace with our neighbors. On the other hand, the flames weaken as they flicker over rampant diaspora assimilation, rising worldwide anti-Semitism, continued conflict with our enemies and our own fractionalization at home.

Chanukah demands that we dream multiple dreams; that we celebrate, but not celebrate fully, until all of our challenges have been met. The message of this festival is that God-given opportunity becomes reality only through our efforts, and there is much left to do.

The centuries since Pharaoh have seen innumerable world powers rise and fall, victims of their own inability to adapt to complex, changing circumstances. These

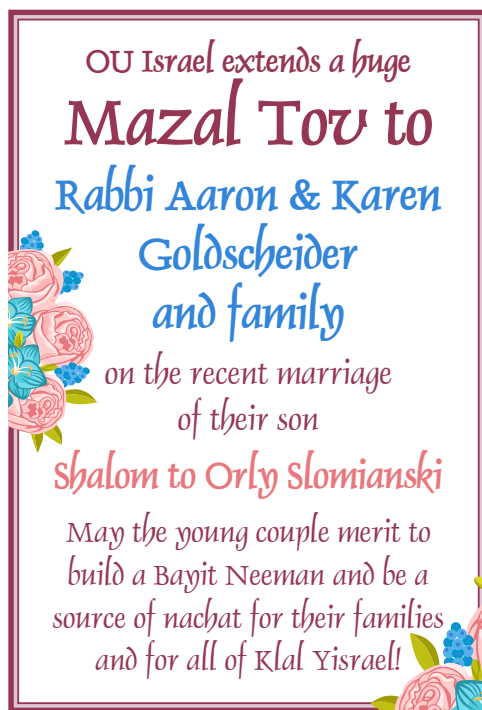
powers shone brightly in one-dimensional worlds of their own creation, only to falter and fail when those worlds collided with the ever-shifting forces of reality.

Through it all, the Jewish people, the spiritual heirs of Yosef, have endured against all odds. Our tradition, with its unique blend of constancy and adaptability, has allowed us to embrace and sanctify a complex world while meeting its challenges head on.

The world of Pharaoh and Antiochus is no more.

The world of Yosef, the complex world we embrace on Chanukah, endures. ■

Rabbi Goldin is the author of the OU press volumes "Unlocking the Torah Text," and "Unlocking the Haggada."



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Mazal Tov to
Rabbi Aaron & Karen
Goldscheider
and family
on the recent marriage
of their son
Shalom to Orly Slomianski
May the young couple merit to
build a Bayit Neeman and be a
source of nachat for their families
and for all of Klal Yisrael!