



MIDEI CHODESH

B'CHODSHO

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Revisiting A Dream

Turn back with me for a moment to Pharaoh's dreams...

Oh, I know that you might well object: *We've moved on. We've closed the Book of Bereishit. The Yosef story is behind us. Why turn back now?*

And yet, my invitation still stands. For there is, I believe, another way to view Pharaoh's visions; an easily missed subtext that lends powerful significance to all that is to follow.

As a first step, let's apply a basic rule of Torah study:

Whenever the Torah repeats an event or discussion in the text, compare the two recorded versions. Inevitably, variations between the accounts will appear, conveying messages of critical importance.

As a case in point, consider Pharaoh's dreams...

We first encounter these visions in real-time; as the Torah details the nocturnal reveries of the sleeping king. Shortly afterwards, however, the text reviews the king's retelling of the dreams. At this

point, the Torah could simply have stated: *And Pharaoh described his dreams to Yosef.* Instead, we are treated to a second, detailed description of these visions; this time through the eyes of the Egyptian King.

And, sure enough, as we compare Pharaoh's version of the dreams to the real-time account, significant differences emerge. These variations offer a telling glimpse into the king's heart; as we see how he interprets, and is affected by, his troubling reveries.

Primary among the variations is one detail, absent in the first account of the dreams, yet present in Pharaoh's recounting. So deeply does this detail seem to disturb the king, that it causes him to suddenly awake.

As Pharaoh's first dream reaches the climactic moment when the seven lean cows swallow the seven healthy cows, the real-time version reads:

"And the seven cows of poor appearance and gaunt flesh consumed the seven cows of beautiful appearance and good health, and Pharaoh awoke."

In contrast, Pharaoh recounts:

"And the emaciated, inferior cows consumed the first seven healthy cows. *And they came inside them and it was not*

apparent that they came inside them- for their appearance was as inferior as before; and I awoke.”

Pharaoh can apparently accept the possibility of lean cows devouring healthy cows.

In his world, after all, nations conquer other nations with regularity. Through subterfuge and cunning, the seemingly weak can even defeat the seemingly strong.

What Pharaoh cannot accept, however, is the possibility that the victor in a battle should remain unchanged. *In the King’s world, conquest invariably bestows upon the conqueror increased physical power and strength.* This rule is the basis of Pharaoh’s own supremacy. When, in his vision, the lean cows remain visibly unaffected after consuming the healthy cows, Pharaoh’s world is threatened. He awakens abruptly, sorely troubled and distraught.

Yosef sets the King’s mind at ease by explaining both the existence of the lean cows and their unchanged status in symbolic terms. Pharaoh’s visions,

he asserts, represent natural challenges which can be overcome through proper planning.

Could it be, however, that Pharaoh’s fears are actually well-founded; that there is a subtext to his dreams, unknown to Pharaoh and perhaps even to Yosef? For Pharaoh and his people are indeed about to be threatened, in ways they can scarcely begin to imagine.

The King’s dreams set in motion a series of events that will eventually give rise to the birth of a unique nation within his very realm. This eternal Jewish Nation-forged through the slavery, exodus and revelation described in the Book of Shmot-will not be bound by the rules governing Pharaoh’s world. Spiritual fortitude will overcome physical strength, as this seemingly weak people outlasts the most powerful empires in the history of mankind. Pharaoh’s kingdom will be only the first to fall in the face of the Jews’ inexorable march across the face of history; a march that will ultimately lead to their own nation’s redemption.

Throughout this journey, the Jewish Nation will not measure its success in terms of increased physical strength but in the unbroken maintenance and development of its enduring spiritual heritage.

“Lean cows” will consume “robust cows.” The physically weak will overcome the strong, yet remain unchanged; over and over again. Pharaoh’s world is about to crumble; he has good reason to be troubled by his dreams.

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Pharaoh's dreams grant us perspective, not on our nation's historical journey, but also on the unique challenge of our times. Outwardly, the parameters of our passage have changed from those predicted to Pharaoh. We are clearly no longer the "lean cows," outlasting our enemies through faith and devotion alone. Against all odds, we have come home. Miraculously, we have created our own state; a power to be reckoned with on the world stage; courted even by nations that were once our sworn enemies. We stand committed to meet those who still threaten us, confident in our strength and ability.

And yet, as succeeding generations of Israeli citizens have come to realize, we cannot let go of that which has made us unique. The very faith in HaShem and loyalty to his law that has sustained us on our journey till now- must be woven into the fabric of our lives in the Jewish State.

Our story has not yet ended. We are challenged to meet this chapter of success as we have met countless chapters of struggle; with an abiding recognition of HaShem's role in our lives, a clear recognition of our continued dependence upon Him, and a deep commitment to the lives he wishes us to lead.

The parameters of our journey have changed from those depicted in Pharaoh's dream; but it's up to us to recognize that the fundamental rules have not.... ■

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

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