

Maamarei Mordechai

הסבר לפי ממש פשוט

Parshas Miketz 5785

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Pharaoh has dreams and calls Yosef for help.

וַיֹּאמֶר פַּרְעֹה אֶל-יֹסֵף חֲלֹמִים חָלַמְתִּי וּפְתֹר אֵין אֵתוֹ וְאֲנִי שָׁמַעְתִּי עָלֶיךָ לֵאמֹר תִּשְׁמַע חֲלֹמִים לְפָתֹר אֹתוֹ:

“And Pharaoh said to Yosef, I have dreamed a dream, and I do not have an interpretation for it. And I have heard about you, saying, you listen to a dream and you interpret it.” (Bereishis 41:15).

Pharaoh clearly believed there was an interpretation to his dream, why? How did Pharaoh know that this dream was more than just random sleep images? Also, what clues about what Pharaoh knew or felt about the dreams can be discerned in how he described the dreams versus how the Torah initially reports them?

As a leader, Pharaoh had the quality of listening. He heard about Yosef. He also recognized in Yosef that Yosef listened to dreams, he didn't just fabricate interpretation for his own glory. “And it was at the end of two years of days...” (Ibid 41:1). Pharaoh did not just have this dream one night, but for two years straight. It is not written at the end of “two years.” It was at the end of שְׁנַיִם יָמִים “two years of days.” Usually, the Torah uses the term “years.” as in when Yaakov worked for Rochel seven years (ibid 29:20) and then for her again another seven years (ibid 29:27). And when he worked an additional six years for Lavan after that. (Ibid 31:41). Later in this very episode, the Torah uses “years” to say it was seven years of plenty (ibid 41:35) and then seven years of famine (ibid 41:38). It says “days” here instead to give the understanding that this has been two years of Pharaoh dreaming the same dream. What was different this time, after two years, was that it was exactly two years of having this same dream, and it being his birthday.

When Pharaoh told the dream to Yosef he said, “I was standing on the bank of the Nile.” (Ibid 41:17). He did not dare repeat that he was standing above or upon the waters of the Nile (ibid 4:1). That would be considered dangerous, even for a Pharaoh, to claim he was above the Nile. The Nile was their source of water, fish, marine animals, and irrigation. There was probably something else different this time. Finally, after two years, he dreamed the interpretation. However, as he told Yosef, “I no longer have it.” It was elusive to him, and despite trying to go back to sleep, he could not regain that interpretation.

Pharaoh retells the dream slightly different than he experienced it. He said he was standing on the banks of the Nile (ibid 41:17) even though he dreamed he was standing on the Nile (ibid 41:1). He dreamed that seven healthy and robust cows emerge from the Nile. (Ibid 14:2). The order of the pasuk is “beautiful in appearance and healthy flesh.” When Pharaoh tells the dream to Yosef he says, “healthy flesh and beautiful in appearance.” (Ibid 14:18). Cows were used in Ancient Egypt as beasts of burden, for

sacrifice, their leather, and their milk. Hashem was showing Pharaoh in the dream cows of status, well formed, excellent for hides and sacrifices. He told Yosef, publicly, they were good for plowing, labor, and milk. He was showing he saw things in the perspective of the people. In the dream he saw the ugly and gaunt cows come out of the Nile, too. (Ibid 41:3). However, he merely says, “there were other cows there.” (Ibid 41:19). He does not want to publicize that the Nile can produce these seven emaciated cows. He adds on, “they were poor....and I have not seen the likes of them, for bad, in the entire lands of Mitzrayim.” In the dream it does not call them poor. However, he calls them that and adds that Mitzrayim never did, and therefore never could, produce such poor animals. As Pharaoh, he had to protect the public relations of the land. He also switched the word דַּקּוּת “thin/lean” for דַּקּוּת “emaciated.” The cows in the dream were ugly and thin. However, Pharaoh saw them even worse. In his mind they were emaciated, empty. He added that such terribly emaciated cows cannot occur in reality in Egypt. This is a land of plenty. Thin cows had no purpose. Therefore, to him they were empty of merit.

In the dream the thin cows consume the healthy cows and Pharaoh awakened. (Ibid 41:4). However, Pharaoh says, not only did the emaciated cows consume the healthy cows, but he added that “it would not be readily known that they consumed them because they were just as ugly and as they were before they consumed the healthy cows; and I wakened.” (Ibid 41:21). With Yosef there, he was now recalling the interpretation of the dream. Pharaoh recalled that he felt that part of the interpretation was that something was going to happen that would make the robust cows disappear without a trace.

Pharaoh then acknowledged that he continued the same dream— “and I continued to dream.” (Ibid 41:22). He dreamed that “seven ears of grain, good and healthy, raised up from a single stalk.” (Ibid 41:5). He told Yosef, “Seven ears of grain, full and good, arose from one stalk.” (Ibid 41:22). The word עָלָה “rose up” is without a vav when Pharaoh repeats the dream. (It had the vav in the dream). Ears of grain were the main food staple in Mitzrayim. Not only were they the best quality in the region, they were the primary staple of the Egyptian diet. Pharaoh had to tread carefully when talking about the grain. He did not want to exacerbate the dream. He minimized the health and goodness of the grain that perished. He made it sound simply, like a full ear. That is why in the dream he saw seven ears of grain that were “thin and scorched by the east wind (ibid 41:6), but he described them as “thin-east-wind scorched.” (Ibid 41:23). He leaves out the “and” to underemphasize how bad they were. He also used the masculine for the good ears of grain אֶתְרֵיָהֶם, implying they are just generic objects. The dream used the feminine אֶתְרֵיהֶן, as one would refer to their foodstuff. In the dream he saw “the thin ears swallowed (fem.) the seven ears, healthy and full.” (Ibid 41:7). He told Yosef, “The thin ears swallowed (masc.) the good ears.” (Ibid 41:24). Again, he downplayed how good the healthy ears were.

Pharaoh had to tell Yosef his dreams to obtain an accurate interpretation. However, he also had to be Pharaoh and publicly relay the dreams in a way that would not cause panic among his people. He also saw the dreams through the lens of a Pharaoh and described them as such.