



Sicha Summary

Chelek 15 | Miketz | Sichah 1

The Context:

Pharaoh dreamed two dreams. In the first, seven robust cows were devoured by seven lean cows, yet their appearance remained the same. In the second, seven healthy ears of corn were swallowed by seven withered grains of corn.

None of Pharaoh's advisors could offer a satisfactory interpretation. Yoseph was summoned and he offered an interpretation that rang true to Pharaoh: the seven good cows and healthy ears of corn alluded to seven years of plenty. The seven lean cows and withered ears of corn alluded to seven years of famine that would "devour" all of the plenty of the preceding seven years. (*Bereishis*, ch. 41)

Then, Yosef offered a piece of unsolicited advice: Pharaoh should appoint someone to oversee conservation of produce during the seven good years, so that Egypt could sustain itself during the famine years.

The Questions:

- 1) Seemingly, Yosef's interpretation is rather straightforward. The fact that healthy cows and corn represent years of plenty and that emaciated cows and corn represent years of famine is not a profoundly creative interpretation. Why could Pharaoh's advisors not conceive of this interpretation?
- 2) Why did Yosef proceed to offer advice to Pharaoh? He was a prisoner called to offer a dream interpretation. He was not asked to advise Pharaoh on matters of state.

The Explanation:

The difficulty in Pharaoh's dream was that the seven emaciated cows "emerged from the river and stood next to the healthy cows on the bank of the river." (*Bereishis* 41:3) If the cows represented years of plenty and famine, why would both sets of cows stand together? The lean cows should have emerged after the healthy cows departed, just like the years of famine follow the years of plenty?

Because of this difficulty, Pharaoh's advisors suggested that Pharaoh would lose seven daughters and that, simultaneously, seven new daughters would be born. (*Rashi*, 41:8) This would explain why both sets of cows stood next to each other.

But Yosef understood that Pharaoh's dream did not just foreshadow future events. It also contained advice for Pharaoh on how to prepare for the coming famine. If Egypt would preserve food during the years of plenty to sustain themselves during the famine, then the "cows" of the years of plenty of the years of famine stand together. For during the years of plenty, Pharaoh is cognizant of the famine, and during the famine, Egypt sustains itself with food from the years of plenty.

This was the genius of Yosef's interpretation, and also why he offered advice to Pharaoh — the advice was not independent of the interpretation, it was part of the interpretation itself.

The Deeper Dimension:

Yosef's dream interpretation began the process of the Egyptian exile and redemption (Yosef was appointed viceroy, which eventually led to his extended family migrating to Egypt). Exile is compared to a dream. For just as dreams contain contradictions — such as in Pharaoh's dream where present and future, plenty and famine, are merged together — so, too, in exile we experience the contradiction of feeling love for G-d but being simultaneously distracted by the pressures of life in exile. (*Torah Or*, *Vayeshev* 28c)

But this is just on the surface. In reality, the incomprehensibility of exile is an expression of a deeper Divine truth that cannot be grasped rationally, but can only be conveyed through a “dreamlike” state of exile.

Yosef’s interpretation which made sense of the contradiction in Pharaoh’s dream alludes to his ability to reveal the Divine source of the contradiction of exile and thereby bring about the redemption.