



# Likkutei Sichos

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## Dreaming of Redemption

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## 1.

### WHAT WAS SO GREAT ABOUT YOSEF'S INTERPRETATION?

Regarding the events in our *parshah* surrounding Pharaoh's dream, {specifically} the sorcerers' inability to interpret the dream, and the elaborate description of Yosef's interpretation<sup>1</sup> — Torah commentators raise several difficulties:<sup>2</sup>

- a. Yosef's interpretation — that the “seven good cows”<sup>3</sup> and the “seven good ears of grain”<sup>4</sup> symbolize seven years of abundance, and the “seven meager and ugly cows”<sup>5</sup> and the “seven empty ears of grain beaten by the east wind”<sup>6</sup> symbolize the seven years of famine — is seemingly a simple interpretation that could have been easily deduced by examining the details of the dream:

“Cows of handsome appearance and robust flesh”<sup>7</sup> resulting from a generally larger crop of grass and grain **obviously** indicates a period of abundance. And the good and full ears of grain certainly depict a good crop of grain — a period of abundance. In contrast, the ugly cows indicate insufficient sustenance, and certainly the thin ears of grain beaten by the east wind clearly symbolize a period of famine. The same applies to the other details of the dream.

In his dream, Pharaoh saw how the cows emerged from the river, and this river — the Nile — watered the land of Egypt.<sup>8</sup> Thus, the grain crop and sustenance of Egypt was dependent upon it. Since the good cows and ears of grain came first, obviously first there was going to be a period of abundance in Egypt, and then the ugly cows and ears of grain {followed} —

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<sup>1</sup> {*Bereishis* 41:8 ff.}

<sup>2</sup> *Rabbeinu Bechayei* on *Bereishis* 41:8; *Akeidas Yitzchak*, *Shaar* 29, question 2; *Abarbanel*, “*Mikeitz*,” the 4<sup>th</sup> question; et al.

<sup>3</sup> {*Bereishis* 41:26.}

<sup>4</sup> {*Ibid.*}

<sup>5</sup> {*Ibid.*, 41:27.}

<sup>6</sup> {*Ibid.*}

<sup>7</sup> {*Ibid.*, 41:2.}

<sup>8</sup> Rashi's commentary on *Bereishis* 41:1.

{indicating} a period of famine.

Since they (both the cows and the ears of grains) each totaled seven, this obviously refers to the seven growth cycles of ears of grain, because every cycle of growth and development of grain occurs once a year (by plowing, etc., until the threshing by the seven good cows<sup>9</sup> — seven times over seven years).

Based on all of the above, the following is altogether incomprehensible:

- a. (a) Why didn't the Egyptian sorcerers understand something so simple, but instead, interpreted Pharaoh's dream in a way that would be unacceptable (to Pharaoh)?<sup>10</sup> (b) What was so extraordinary about the acumen that Yosef showed in interpreting the dreams that elicited such enthusiasm from Pharaoh to the extent that Yosef was appointed viceroy?
- b. Immediately after he concluded his dream interpretation to Pharaoh, Yosef **continued** — underscoring that what he was saying was a continuation to his earlier words, by starting with the conjunction *and* — the letter *vav*<sup>11</sup> — and offered Pharaoh advice (and at length): “**And** now let Pharaoh seek out... let Pharaoh do this and appoint...”<sup>12</sup> Seemingly, it is confusing why Yosef involved himself in matters of state. Pharaoh had asked him to interpret the dream, not for advice on how to run his country.

[Commentators<sup>13</sup> note that Yosef added the advice, “And now let Pharaoh seek out...,” because he was explaining to Pharaoh that was the reason and purpose for Hashem informing Pharaoh in the dream “what Hashem is doing”<sup>14</sup> — that it wasn't just to distress Pharaoh (or the like), but in order to “let Pharaoh seek out... and appoint officials....”

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<sup>9</sup> {I.e, plowing and threshing were done in the past with cows, so the seven cows are an allusion to seven cycles of producing grain.}

<sup>10</sup> Rashi's commentary on *Bereishis* 41:8.

<sup>11</sup> {Meaning “and.”}

<sup>12</sup> *Bereishis* 41:33 ff.

<sup>13</sup> *Abarbanel* and others.

<sup>14</sup> *Bereishis* 41:25, 28.

But this explanation falls short, because if this were the case, Yosef should have said clearly that the reason Hashem showed this to Pharaoh was so that “now Pharaoh should seek out... do this...”]

- c. Since “his (Pharaoh’s) spirit was troubled”<sup>15</sup> was a result of not having an **interpretation** of the dream, which was why Yosef was brought {to Pharaoh} from prison, and after Yosef interpreted the dream, the Torah says,<sup>16</sup> “The **matter** (including, or {perhaps} only) — Yosef’s advice — pleased Pharaoh...,” the Torah should have first and foremost said, “the **interpretation** pleased Pharaoh” (of which there is absolutely no mention!).
- d. Most perplexing: Since the above three questions (also) pose a difficulty according to *pshat*,<sup>17</sup> why does Rashi not offer an explanation and resolve these difficulties in his Torah commentary? Rashi is the foremost of all *pashtanim*,<sup>18</sup> and clarifies every difficulty that arises in *pshat*, as known!

We must therefore say that the explanation for all of the above is either self-understood according to *pshat*, or it is alluded to in Rashi’s commentary {here or elsewhere}.

## 2.

HOW MANY INTERPRETATIONS DID THE SORCERERS GIVE?

We can clarify this matter by prefacing with Rashi’s remarks on the verse,<sup>19</sup> “no one interpreted them for Pharaoh”: “They did interpret them, but not for Pharaoh... for they said, ‘You will have seven daughters, and you will bury seven daughters.’” This is baffling:

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<sup>15</sup> {*Bereishis* 41:8.}

<sup>16</sup> *Bereishis* 41:37; see *Seforno* on this verse.

<sup>17</sup> {The plain meaning of the text.}

<sup>18</sup> {Commentators who interpret the Torah according to *pshat*, the simple meaning of the verse.}

<sup>19</sup> *Bereishis* 41:8.

- a. Why does Rashi need to spell out for us the sorcerers' interpretation, instead of being content to say only what is necessary to understand the **verse's pshat** — “They did interpret them, but not for Pharaoh, for what they said was unacceptable to him, and he was completely dissatisfied with their interpretation”?
- b. The source for the explanation, “They said, ‘You will have seven daughters and you will bury seven daughters,’” is in the **Midrash**<sup>20</sup> [**this** interpretation is not alluded to at all in the Torah]. But the Midrash says that **this** interpretation was only of the dream about the seven good cows and the seven ugly ones, and the Midrash continues: “**They also said**, ‘The seven good ears of grain implies that seven kingdoms that you will conquer, and the seven ugly ears of grains implies that seven regions that will rebel against you.’” Why does Rashi modify {the Midrash's words} and say that the sorcerers had only offered one interpretation? [Especially since it would seem obvious that the **two** dreams refer to **two** separate points — which was why Yosef had to explain in his interpretation, “Concerning the repetition of the dream....”<sup>21</sup> So obviously the sorcerers had interpreted it as two distinct matters.]

The explanation is that this question itself points to the answer: Rashi specifically chooses **this interpretation** of the sorcerers because it conforms to *pshat*, and therefore — according to *pshat* — the sorcerers only offered **this one** interpretation. This also explains the sorcerers' error that misled them to not interpret the dream **literally** (seven years, etc. as above section 1). Hence, the tremendous originality of Yosef's interpretation is also understood, as we will explain.

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<sup>20</sup> *Bereishis Rabba* 89:6.

<sup>21</sup> {*Bereishis* 41:32.}

### 3.

#### ONE MESSAGE

According to this nuance in Rashi's remarks, it is also obvious that according to Rashi, we cannot say (as the Midrash does) that Yosef's innovation was in (the opening words of) his interpretation, that "Pharaoh's dream is one"<sup>22</sup> — while the sorcerers opined, according to the Midrash, that the dream about the cows and the dream about the ears of grains were two distinct dreams with different interpretations, which is why they did not interpret the dreams literally.

Rather, Rashi says clearly that "they said, 'You will have seven daughters and you will bury seven daughters,'" without adding a separate interpretation for the second dream. Implying, as we mentioned, that according to **Rashi** — {who uses a} ***pshat*** {approach} and not **homiletic** {as used in Midrash} — the sorcerers also understood that the dreams consisted of a singular message.

### 4.

#### TAKING DREAMS LITERALLY

Abrabanel<sup>23</sup> adds (to what we discussed in section 3) that the difference between Yosef and the sorcerers was in the general approach to dreams and their interpretations: The sorcerers were familiar with the wisdom involved in interpreting dreams, and that a person's imagination leads him to envision things in a dream as allegories and parables, etc. So they also interpreted this dream {along those lines,} that the cows and ears of grain were not to be understood literally, but as an allegory and an allusion to seven daughters (or seven kingdoms). Yosef, conversely, knew through Divine inspiration (not (merely) through the natural wisdom of dream interpreters) the truth: This dream was unlike all others (which are linked also to a person's "imagination," and are therefore allegories and parables). Yosef knew Pharaoh's dream was a

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<sup>22</sup> *Bereishis* 41:25.

<sup>23</sup> {Don Yitzchak Abrabanel, 1437–1508, Portuguese Torah commentator.}

Divine message. Therefore, the cows and ears of grain must be interpreted literally.

However, according to *pshat* and in Rashi's commentary on the Torah, we do not find any distinctions between various dreams or dream interpreters.

[Especially since we already learned from the Torah that dreams are visions and are to be interpreted literally (not as allusions or far-fetched allusions):

(Starting with) Yaakov's dream,<sup>24</sup> "He dreamed and behold! a ladder standing on the ground and its top reached the heavens, and behold Hashem's angels were ascending and descending on it..." — which is understood literally, that the angels who had escorted him in the Land of Israel until he reached outside of Israel, were going up to heaven on the ladder, and the angels overseeing matters outside of Israel were "descending..." in order to escort him outside of Israel.

Also, "I saw in a dream, the male goats that mounted the animals were ringed, speckled, and striped."<sup>25</sup>

And more so (most similar to our situation): Yosef's {own} dreams,<sup>26</sup> "We were binding sheaves in the midst of the field, and behold my sheaf arose and stood upright, and behold your sheaves encircled it and prostrated themselves to my sheaf." Yosef's brothers understood this simply, that it meant they would prostrate themselves before Yosef (in a matter pertaining to {the purchase of} sheaves and grain), and so, too, with the second dream.]

Obviously, according to *pshat*, interpreting the dream simply to be referring to seven years of abundance and {followed by} seven years of famine (and that it concerns to the whole of Egypt), is a lot simpler and makes the most

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<sup>24</sup> *Bereishis* 28:12; See Rash, loc. cit.

<sup>25</sup> *Bereishis* 31:10.

<sup>26</sup> *Bereishis* 37:5 and on.

sense, at first glance, rather than suggesting that (it refers only to Pharaoh and that) it is only a dubious allusion to something completely unrelated.

## 5.

### WHY INCLUDE THE SORCERERS' INTERPRETATION?

The explanation: The primary difficulty in the dream (which is the reason the sorcerers were unable to interpret the dream straightforwardly, that the seven good cows, etc., refers to abundance and sustenance, etc.) is the dream's continuation:<sup>27</sup> “Seven other cows were coming up after them from the river, of ugly appearance and lean flesh, **and they stood beside the cows on the river bank.**” If the ugly cows refer to **other, future** seven years, how could they appear **together** with the good cows, which represent the **bygone** seven years of abundance? One year can only begin after the previous year concludes.

Therefore, the sorcerers in their wisdom came up with the interpretation, “You will have seven daughters and you will bury seven daughters,” because in that interpretation both events can occur simultaneously — “You will have seven daughters,” while at the same time, “you will bury seven daughters”:

In those days, it was common, especially for a king, and particularly **Pharaoh king of Egypt** — who ruled over a land like Egypt which was awash in lasciviousness<sup>28</sup> — to have several wives and concubines.

Hence, it was possible for him to “have seven daughters,” while at the same time, “you will bury seven daughters” — another seven daughters, not the same ones that “you will have” at that same time.

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<sup>27</sup> {*Bereishis* 41:3.}

<sup>28</sup> Rashi on *Bereishis* 12:19.



[This also explains how this is an interpretation for “they devoured”<sup>29</sup> and “they swallowed.”<sup>30</sup> The pain and heartache of burying seven daughters “swallows” and erases the joy of having seven other daughters.]

However, “you will conquer seven kingdoms and seven regions will rebel against you” is quite uncommon to occur simultaneously, since obviously one king does not lead a battle on seven fronts at once; first one kingdom is conquered, then another, and so on.

This is why Rashi **cites** the sorcerers’ actual interpretation that “you will have seven daughters and you will bury seven daughters,” and is not content to say that what they said was unacceptable to Pharaoh, because this interpretation alludes to the reason the sorcerers did not interpret the dream **straightforwardly**, that it refers to seven years of abundance and seven years of famine, which was Yosef’s eventual interpretation.

## 6.

### THE ADVICE IS PART OF THE INTERPRETATION

This also explains why Yosef’s interpretation was so novel, and why **immediately** after offering his interpretation to Pharaoh, based on the obvious meaning of the content of the dream (that the seven good cows and seven good ears of grain refers to “seven years of abundance” and the “ugly {ones}” refer to “seven years of famine”), Yosef had to explain why Pharaoh saw the ugly cows as “they stood **beside** the {good} cows on the river bank.” (This was the scene that had misled the sorcerers to come up with a different interpretation, as discussed.)

Yosef therefore added — not as a side point but as a continuation and a crucial detail of the **interpretation**<sup>31</sup> — “Let Pharaoh seek out an

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<sup>29</sup> {*Bereishis* 41:4. What the ugly cows did to the good cows.}

<sup>30</sup> {*Bereishis* 41:7. What the ugly ears of grain did to the good ears of grain.}

<sup>31</sup> {*Bereishis* 41:33 ff.}

understanding and wise man... and appoint officials over the land and prepare the land of Egypt during the seven years of plenty. Let them collect all the food of these coming good years, and let them gather the grain.... Thus the food will remain as a reserve for the land for the seven years of famine.” This explains and solves how both periods of seven years could occur all at once:

If right at the **beginning** of the seven years of abundance, there was an awareness of and concern about the seven years of famine to follow, and already then reserves of grain would be collected in anticipation of these years, that would explain how during the seven years of plenty, the seven years of famine also were present (at the same time) – mentally, emotionally, and in concrete **action**.

And the reverse was true too: During the seven years of famine (it is as if) the seven years of abundance existed **concurrently**, since the people were sustained during these years by the grain collected during the seven years of abundance.

This also clarifies the wording in the Torah, “the matter (i.e., the **advice**, not the actual interpretation) pleased Pharaoh and all his servants,” and that Pharaoh’s praise for Yosef was that “there is no one as **understanding and wise** as you”<sup>32</sup> (not **emphasizing** his primary quality in this case – as a dream interpreter): The excellency of Yosef’s wisdom was not expressed only in his interpreting the dream, i.e., the seven good cows symbolized seven years, etc. (for this doesn’t require any {great} wisdom, as discussed). Rather, Yosef’s accomplishment was that in his wisdom, he managed to merge his interpretation of the seven years of abundance with the seven years of famine, {explaining} how both periods could coexist. This, specifically, was what confirmed the validity of his interpretation.

In other words: “There is no one as understanding and wise as you,” because with his advice, he explained how Pharaoh was informed in the dream

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<sup>32</sup> {Bereishis 41:39.}

itself (not only what Hashem intended to do, but) also what Pharaoh should do about it, “And now let Pharaoh seek out...”

## 7.

### DREAMS CAN CONTAIN CONTRADICTIONS

The explanation on a deeper level: Pharaoh’s dreams and Yosef’s interpretation were the cause and the beginning of the Egyptian exile (and the eventual redemption from Egypt, as is also clear, since these events led to Yosef becoming ruler over the land, which in turn led to Yaakov and his sons moving to Egypt). This must mean that the substance of the dream and its interpretation allude to and express the theme of exile and redemption.

To explain: Regarding the verse,<sup>33</sup> “When Hashem will return the captivity to Zion, we shall be like dreamers,” Chassidus teaches<sup>34</sup> that exile is compared to a dream: Just as a dream can fuse two opposites, the same is true of a Jew during exile; two contradictory behaviors can be synthesized — a love for Hashem (during prayer) and the pressure of engaging in worldly affairs during the remainder of the day.

Thus, in Pharaoh’s dream — which was an indication for (and a beginning of) the exile, there was a clear combination of these two opposites: “They stood **beside** the cows” — the seven years of abundance together with the seven years of famine, as discussed above. Because in addition to the entire concept of time being specifically one **after** another, one period follows another — as the wording {clearly defines}: **past, present, and future** — there are specific periods of time that are contextual **opposites**: years of **abundance** versus years of **famine**. This alludes to the fusion of the {other} two opposites — love of Hashem (years of **abundance**) along with financial anxiety<sup>35</sup> (years of **famine**).

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<sup>33</sup> *Tehillim* 126:1.

<sup>34</sup> *Torah Or*, “*Vayeshev*,” 28c; *Toras Chaim*, “*Miketz*,” 74b ff; *Or Hatorah*, “*Miketz*” (vol. 6) 1100b ff., et al.

<sup>35</sup> Financial worries prove that a person’s trust in and attachment to Hashem is **lacking**, since He sustains and provides, etc., out of His goodness, grace and generosity (expressions of Hashem’s **love**, etc.). See *Maamar “Mayim Rabim, 5738,”* ch.2. {[Unbreakable Soul - Mayim Rabim, 5738](#) (Kehot, NY).}

## 8.

### PREPARING FOR THE REDEMPTION

This also clarifies why Yosef's interpretation was primarily about combining and fusing these two opposites.

Chassidus discusses<sup>36</sup> why specifically Yosef was an interpreter of dreams: The simple explanation why two opposites can coexist while a person is sleeping (and dreaming) is because a person's intellect is inactive and all that remains operational is the faculty of imagination. Similarly, during Exile, the supernal *mochin*,<sup>37</sup> in general, and that of the individual soul, in particular, do not radiate openly. However, the inner reason for this phenomenon is because the spiritual root of the period of Exile is more sublime (than the period of non-Exile): It derives from the level of *iggulim*<sup>38</sup> which transcends the divisions characteristic of spiritual vectors that have higher and lower points (just as a literal circle has neither beginning nor end).<sup>39</sup>

That is why this level is en clothed (and concealed) within a dream — not while a person's cognitive and intellectual faculties are active, as they are instruments of "division."<sup>40</sup>

This explains why Yosef was a dream interpreter, since his soul-root was in (the world of) *iggulim*. As such, he was able to dispel the concealment and remove the garments in which the aspect of *iggulim* was en clothed, so that it could stand revealed here on this lower plane — just as it does at its root.

This also clarifies why the focus of Yosef's interpretation contained the coexistence of two opposites, seven years of abundance and seven years of

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<sup>36</sup> *Torah Or*, "Vayeshev," 29a; *Toras Chaim*, "Vayechi," s.v. "Ben Poras Yosef," ch. 3; *Or Hatorah*, "Miketz," 1102a ff.

<sup>37</sup> {Lit., "minds," refers to a state of expanded spiritual consciousness.}

<sup>38</sup> {Lit: "circles."}

<sup>39</sup> {"*Iggulim*" describes the divine light that does not conform or tailor itself to the recipient of the light. It remains "undefined" and infinite like a circle that has no beginning or end. As such, it transcends "division" and differentiation of spiritual levels. "*Kav*" (line) represents the divine light that conforms to the recipient. Just like a line has a top and bottom, so, too, this spiritual level is composed of different spiritual levels, some higher than others.}

<sup>40</sup> {In this context, *division* means the understanding and discernment of differences between items}

famine, because it was specifically in this detail that the source of dreams, the aspect of *iggulim*, was manifest.

Yosef's interpretation<sup>41</sup> implanted the power for redemption, enabling the removal of the concealment and the garments of (the dream as it is expressed in) Exile, allowing the *makifim*<sup>42</sup> and *iggulim* to become revealed as they are in essence.

This revelation will be completed in the future era<sup>43</sup> {when Moshiach comes}, at which time the promise,<sup>44</sup> “Your Teacher shall no longer be concealed from you” — without a garment — will be fulfilled. And “on that day, Hashem will be one and His name one<sup>45</sup> — My Name will be written as it is read.”<sup>46</sup>

– Based on a talk delivered on Shabbos *parshas Miketz* 5732 (1971) and 5734 (1973)

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<sup>41</sup> {That is, his resolution of the enigma intrinsic to Pharaoh's dream.}

<sup>42</sup> {Encompassing spheres.}

<sup>43</sup> {In the original Hebrew, “*laseed lavoh*.”}

<sup>44</sup> *Yeshayahu* 30:20.

<sup>45</sup> {*Zecharia* 14:9.}

<sup>46</sup> *Pesachim* 50a.