

United We Stand

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Parshas Mikeitz

4th of Tevet 5784

The Parsha's Path

And behold! Seven other cows (paros acheiros) ascended after them (41:3).

This week's Parsha opens with Pharaoh's dreams which nobody except Yosef can interpret. Pharaoh first dreams that seven plump, beautiful cows come out of the Nile, followed by seven skinny, ugly cows who eat them up. Then he dreams of seven plump, beautiful ears of corn growing on a single stalk, which are eaten by seven other parched, worn ears of corn. Yosef explains that both these dreams allude to seven years of plenty followed by years of famine, which will "eat up" the years of plenty to the point that they're utterly forgotten.

Why does the Torah stress that the second set of cows were *acheiros* - "others"? Isn't it obvious from the context that these aren't the same cows? Secondly, what's the significance of the beautiful ears of corn growing "on one stalk"?

Rashi points out that in describing the fat cows as "of beautiful appearance", the Torah alludes to the fact that during times of plenty, people appear beautiful to one another as people tend not to be jealous and look at those around them positively. In that spirit, Kli Yakar suggests that in referring to the scrawny cows as *acheiros*, the Torah alludes to the otherness and disunity that would be felt during the years of scarcity. Likewise, in referring to the corn as growing on one stalk, the Torah alludes to the unity that would be felt in the years of plenty.

When one feels that they don't have enough, they feel weak and vulnerable. Their focus of concern turns inward and others are seen as potential threats. When one feels they have all that they need, then they are liberated from enmity and can focus outwards on what they can do for others. They move from a victimhood mentality to a sense of empowerment to do good. Kli Yakar quotes a common adage from the times of Chazal, cited by Rav Pappa (Baba Metzia 59a): *When the barley is emptied from the jug, quarrel knocks and enters the house.* The key to avoiding quarrels and ensuring peace is to feel that "the jug is always full", that we have everything we need to do what we need to do.

Sometimes life makes this easy and natural. We feel everything is going well and it's easy to feel confident and positive. Or, something wakes us up to what's really

important in life, and we feel a deep sense of unity and wholeness. Yet if we are to sustain these feelings when circumstances change, we have to prepare during those moments. Just as Yosef advised Pharaoh to fill his storehouses with grain, we need to fill the storehouses of our self-esteem with the *bitachon* that G-d gives us everything we need to fulfill our mission. We have to take the understanding and confidence from our moments of clarity and remind ourselves of it when those moments fade.

Several weeks ago, I expressed the concern of many that after this war ends (BE"H very soon), the unity that is felt now will quickly dissipate. I prefer to be more optimistic; Klal Yisrael has realized that going back to the way things were before is not acceptable. Our unity is not merely one of utilitarian necessity, but of a deep reckoning that we are part of something much larger than ourselves, much more important than our quarrels, and that G-d empowered us with a mission far bigger than our own *daled amos*. It is the sacred duty of each of us to take the clarity of perspective from these times, store it away deep inside our souls, and distribute its light among all who need it.

Deeper Meanings

Adapted from 5782.

There was no one to interpret them for Pharaoh (41:8).

This week's Parsha opens with Pharaoh having two dreams. In the first dream, seven fat cows come out of the river, followed by seven skinny cows. The skinny cows devour the fat cows. In the second dream, seven plump ears of grain edge on one stalk, and seven skinny, windswept ears of grain appear on another, and the seven skinny ears eat the seven fat ears. Pharaoh can't figure out what the dream means. He calls all of the sorcerers and wise men of Egypt, yet no one can come up with a satisfactory explanation. The midrash tells us that some tried to suggest that the dreams meant that Pharaoh would have seven daughters and they would all die in his lifetime, an interpretation which hardly seems satisfying.

We may have the handicap of confirmation bias, but was it really so hard to interpret Pharaoh's dreams? All of the signs were there: Cows symbolize plowing, grain symbolizes agriculture, etc. Is it really plausible that none

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of the wise men of Egypt, who were supposed to be experts at deciphering dreams, could find the right angle?

Rabbeinu Bachya explains that G-d confounded all of the wisdom of Pharaoh's sorcerers and wise men in order to facilitate the ascent of Yosef. He points to a verse in Yeshayahu that alludes to this very point: *Utter fools are the nobles of Tanis, the sagest of Pharaoh's advisers have given foolish counsel* (19:11). The fact was that the wise men of Egypt, at that moment, were rendered fools by G-d.

When I first read this explanation, I was somewhat mystified. After all, when Pharaoh asks Yosef to interpret his dream, Yosef answers him, *Not !! G-d will see to Pharaoh's welfare* (41:16). While Rabbeinu Bachya's explanation would suggest that Yosef was able to figure out Pharaoh's dreams by himself without any special revelation, Yosef's own statement implies that his interpretation comes only from G-d.

It was only after some reflection that I realized that this is precisely what made Yosef so great. Yosef recognized that everything he had, including all of his natural talents and wisdom, came from G-d. He was not merely telling Pharaoh that his interpretations came from Divine revelation, but a much more profound lesson: that Man is not to be credited for what he can do or understand, because all of that comes from G-d. The only thing man can take credit for is how he chooses to subject those abilities in service of the Divine will. This is, in fact, what Rabbeinu Bachya himself says: *Yosef answered that there's no power of wisdom or understanding in me, rather it's external to me ... everything comes from the power of G-d, for He is in charge of all the powers.*

Yosef's attitude enabled him to flourish no matter where G-d put him, because he was able to recognize that his success had nothing to do with what he was, and he didn't let it detract from his focus on being an agent of G-d. His extraordinary humility enabled him to recognize that his sole identity was in how he chose to serve G-d, and everything else was external to him.

The Bais Yosef famously asks why we observe Chanukah for eight days. If there was enough oil to last for one day and it burned for eight, then only seven of those days was a miracle, so we should only celebrate for a week. One of the many answers that have been suggested is that even the fact that the oil burned for one day is a miracle. Even the "natural" order of the world is a gift of G-d that must not be taken for granted.

This is what Chanukah is all about: recognizing that no matter what we have and no matter what we wear or what we do, no matter how "natural" it seems, all of our strength comes from G-d. Whether we're on top of the world or in a pit of seemingly hopeless despair, we

must recognize that "All is in the hands of Heaven, except for fear of Heaven." All we can do is try to follow in the footsteps of Yosef, kindling the flame of our soul and asking G-d to light the way.

Goal of the week

With the long duration of the current *matzav*, we may have waned in our efforts to do everything we can to contribute. Let's strengthen ourselves to keep giving more, writing more letters, and doing anything else we can in support of Israel.

This week's bulletin is dedicated for a Refuah Sheleima for Shaindel Temma bas Rochel Zlotta, Masha Sarah bas Tziviah Leah, Bracha bas Shoshanah, Reuven ben Golda, Yitzchok Moshe haKohen ben Miriam, Ephraim Melech ben Tzilah, Yitzchok Elimelech ben Chanah Sarah, Gavriel Margoliot Ben Malka, and all those injured by the war and acts of terror, as well as for the safe return of all the hostages and soldiers. Please have them in mind in your Tefillos.

Have A Great Shabbos !!

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