

Zera Shimshon

by Rabbi Shimshon Chaim Nachmani zt"l

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Chapter X: Mikeitz (Gen. 41:1–44:17)

Essay 7. Why was Pharaoh's dream doubled?

Pharaoh dreamed of seven healthy cows which were eaten by seven lean cows, and seven full stalks of grain which were eaten by seven thin stalks of grain. Joseph was brought to interpret the dreams.

פסוק "שבע פרות הטבת שבע שנים הנה" וכו'. הקשה הנרע ברך (חלק א) דמה ענין הפרות להראות על שובע ורעב, בשלמא בשבלים ניקא, ועוד למה בא החלום בשני דברים עכ"ל.

There is a verse: **“The seven healthy cows are seven years, and the seven healthy ears are seven years; it is the same dream”** (Gen. 41:26). **The Zera Berach¹ (part 1) questioned what relevance the cows had to show abundance or famine, though granted regarding the grain it was fine.** That is, Gen. 43:32 discusses the brothers sitting down to eat an animal that was slaughtered on Joseph's instructions, and states that the Egyptians ate separately, being disgusted by the Hebrews. Onkelos indicates that the disgust was that the Egyptians did not eat animal flesh, while other commentators suggest other reasons for their disgust, such as the fact that the Egyptians considered themselves superior to other peoples, or that they specifically looked down upon the Hebrews because they were shepherders. If we take Onkelos view, that the Egyptians did not eat meat, then we can understand the question as to what relevance the cows had to show abundance or famine.²

Furthermore, why did the dream come with two subjects, i.e., one dream related to cows and one to grain. Joseph tells Pharaoh the dream was repeated because the matter will soon come about (Gen. 41:32), but then why didn't Pharaoh dream twice about the grain?

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¹ Rabbi Berachia Berech ben R' Yitzchak Izaak Shapiro, Zera Berech (Krakow 1646), commentary on the Torah. The Zera Berach quoted is Part 1, Mikeitz, paragraph entitled “ויעדין” (page 45a).

² Historians and archaeologists say that the Egyptians did eat meat, though beef was a luxury item only eaten by the royalty. The translator supposes that if one takes that view, then if Pharaoh had only dreamed about the stalks, an interpreter of dreams might have thought that the general populace would find food scarce, but that the royalty would still have their luxury food items. Conversely, if Pharaoh had only dreamed about the cows, an interpreter of dreams might have thought that only the luxury foods of the royalty would be in short supply, and that Pharaoh's household would have to eat the grain products that the general populace ate. The dual dream showed that the famine would affect rich and poor alike. However, the translator does not know if any of our commentators believe that the Egyptians ate meat, in contradiction to Onkelos, and we should be cautious about learning something that is not in agreement with our sages.

וּנְרָאָה לְפָרֵץ בְּמָה שֶׁכָּתְבוּ הַמְּפָרְשִׁים שְׂאוֹתָיו הַלִּילָה שֶׁחָלַם פְּרַעֲוֵה הָיָה רֹאשׁ הַשָּׁנָה כְּדֹאמְרֵינוּן בְּרֹאשׁ הַשָּׁנָה יֵצֵא יוֹסֵף מִבֵּית הָאֲסוּרִים, וְכִשְׂשֵׁרְאֵל מִתְגַּבְּרִים בְּשׂוֹפָר בְּרֹאשׁ הַשָּׁנָה, יוֹצֵאִים "קִלְת וּבִרְקִים" וְשׂוֹבְרִים שָׂרֵי מַעֲלָה וְהָאוּמָה נוֹפֶלֶת, וְזֶהוּ שֶׁכָּתוּב "אֵת אֲשֶׁר הָאֱלֹהִים עֲשָׂה" לְמַעַלָּה בְּיוֹם זֶה הִרְאָה לְפְרַעֲוֵה, רָצָה לוֹמַר מִכּוֹת יִהְיוּ לְפְרַעֲוֵה עַכ"ל.

This appears to be solved by what the commentators wrote, that the night that Pharaoh dreamed was Rosh Hashana, as it is said, “It is taught [in a Baraita]: Rabbi Eliezer says . . . on Rosh Hashana, Joseph came out from prison.”³ When the Children of Israel are strengthened—it’s with a shofar on Rosh Hashana, there is “thunder and lightning”⁴ and they break the princes [i.e., guardian angels] above [in Heaven] and the nation [opposing Israel] falls [when its guardian angel falls].⁵ This is what is written, “What G-d has done”⁶—above, on this day, i.e., on Rosh Hashana, that He has judged that He will break the power of Egypt’s guardian angel—He has shown to Pharaoh;⁷ this refers to the plagues that Pharaoh will have.

וְאִם אָנוּ נֹאמֵר שֶׁלְכֹךְ בָּא הַחֲלוֹם בְּפָרוֹת לְפִי שֶׁהוּא רֹאשׁ הַשָּׁנָה, וּבְרֹאשׁ הַשָּׁנָה תּוֹקְעִים יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּשׂוֹפָר, וְשָׁל פְּרָה פָּסוּל מִפְּנֵי שֶׁנִּקְרָא קָרוֹ. וְכַתִּיב "וְכָל-קִרְנֵי רְשָׁעִים אֲגַדַּע תְּרוֹמְמָנָה קַרְנוֹת צַדִּיק", כְּלוּמַר שֶׁכָּל הַקָּרוֹ וְהַחוֹזֵק וְשִׂיחָה לְמַצְרַיִם בְּשִׁבִיל הַשׁוֹבֵעַ וְהַפְּסוֹף וְהַזֶּהָב, הַכֹּל יִהְיֶה נֹאכָד מִמַּצְרַיִם וְיִהְיֶה לְיִשְׂרָאֵל, כְּדֹאמְרֵינוּן בְּפָרֵץ בְּתֵרָא דְפְסָחִים עַל "וַיִּנְצְלוּ אֶת-מִצְרַיִם". וְעוֹד, "תְּרוֹמְמָנָה קַרְנוֹת צַדִּיק", זֶה יוֹסֵף שֶׁיֵּצֵא מִבֵּית הָאֲסוּרִים וְנַעֲשֶׂה מְלֶכֶד. וְכֵן זֶה כְּתוּב לְפִי דַעַת הַמְּקוּשָׁה.

We are told that this is the reason the dream came regarding cows, that it is because it was Rosh Hashana, and on Rosh Hashana, Israel blows the shofar, and [a shofar] made from a cow is invalid to be blown in fulfillment of the mitzvah. That is because [the horn of a cow] is always called [keren] [קֶרֶן] by Scripture, referring to the keratin from which a horn is formed, and is never called “a shofar.”⁸ I.e., for other animals, the projection on their head may at times be called “a horn” by Scripture, but at other times it will be called a shofar.⁹

³ Rosh Hashana 10b.

⁴ Ex. 19:16.

⁵ Judah ben Samuel of Regensburg (1150–1217), Sefer Chasidim 1160. This does not speak specifically about Rosh Hashana, but says, in general: “When Israel was strengthened by the sound of the shofar and the trumpets, there was lightning coming out of the ark, and lightning and thunder and the breaking of the guardian angels, and the fall of the nation below, and the sound of the L-rd breaking the cedars.” See also Ramban on Numb. 14:9, “It is possible that the verse alludes to the princes above [in heaven], for no nation falls unless its prince falls first.”

⁶ Gen. 41:25.

⁷ Gen. 41:25 reads ("אֵת אֲשֶׁר הָאֱלֹהִים עֲשָׂה הַגִּיד לְפְרַעֲוֵה"), “What G-d is going to do, He has told to Pharaoh.” The Zera Shimshon’s text uses the verb *her’ah* [הִרְאָה] [“showed”] instead of *higid* [הִגִּיד] [“told”], which is apparently taken by accident from the similar text of Gen. 41:28 has similar text (“אֲשֶׁר הָאֱלֹהִים עֲשָׂה הִרְאָה אֶת-פְּרַעֲוֵה”). The mistaken substitution of one verb for another appeared in at least two earlier commentaries. Bachya ben Asher ibn Halawa (“Rabbeinu Bachya,” 1255–1340) on Gen. 41:16, “Seeing that the dream of Pharaoh forecast interference by G-d in these ‘natural’ forces of the earth to produce crops, Joseph added, ‘what G-d is about to do, (i.e. changes in established patterns of nature) He has shown to Pharaoh.’” Chaim ibn Attar (c. 1696–1743), Or haChaim on Gen. 41:25, “What G-d is about to do, He has shown to Pharaoh.”

⁸ Rosh Hashana 26a.

⁹ The mevuar edition of the Zera Shimshon Institute suggests one implication of the cows appearing in Pharaoh’s dream is that the Egyptians had cows and their horns, but not a shofar, and therefore they lacked the power of the shofar, with all it can bring to the Jews, such as breaking the guardian angel of Egypt.

It's written, "All the horns [karnei] [קרְנֵי] of the wicked [people] I will cut; but the horns [karnot] [קרְנוֹת] of the righteous [individual] shall be lifted up" (Ps. 75:11), that is to say, regarding "All the horns of the wicked I will cut," that all of the horns and power that will be in Egypt because of the abundance and the silver and the gold, all will be lost from Egypt and will become Israel's. This is as it says in the final chapter of tractate Pesachim (119a) on the phrase, "thus they stripped the Egyptians."

The Torah associates horns with power, as animals use horns to fight others.¹⁰ As far as the association of a horn with abundance, a horn evokes the animal itself, and one idea, as the Zera Shimshon will note below (following Abarbanel), the cow was a powerful plow animal, increasing the yield of grain beyond what it would be without using the cow.

A second idea is that the Torah notes the use of hollow horns as storage containers, such as the "horn of oil" of I Sam. 16:1 and 16:13, I Kings 1:39.¹¹ The iconography of a horn used as a container of food was reinforced by the idolatrous Greeks and Romans in the *cornucopia*, the "horn of plenty," illustrated in their paintings and sculptures as an animal horn (or later a horn-shaped wicker basket) overflowing with fruits, and typically being carried or associated with a goddess.¹² The translator notes that the Latin word *cornucopia* is derived from the roots *cornu* (horn) + *copia* (plenty), and the earlier Greeks used κέρας ("keras") for "horn," and one cannot ignore the similarity between these Greek and Latin words and the Hebrew word *keren*. This "horn of plenty"—sans the idolatrous goddess—was later introduced on the coins of the Hasmoneans and King Herod. Thus, there is direct support from the Torah, and indirect support from its derivative use by the Greeks and Romans, for viewing the horn as representing abundance.

Further, regarding "but the horns of the righteous [individual] shall be lifted up," this is Joseph, who came out of prison and became king, i.e., Pharaoh's right-hand man. The verse begins with "wicked" in the plural form, and the ends with "righteous" in the singular form. It stands to reason that righteous individual is Joseph. We have written all this according to the view of the questioner.

אָמְנָם לְפִי הָאֱמֶת נִרְאָה דְקוֹשֵׁיָא מְעִיקְרָא לִיתָא, דְקָרָא פְתִיב וְרַב־תְּבוּאוֹת בְּכַח שׁוֹר, אִם כֵּן הַשׁוֹר הוּא הַגּוֹרֵם לְרוֹב תְּבוּאוֹת כְּשֶׁעוֹבֵד אֶת הָאֲדָמָה בְּרוֹב פֶּת. וּבְפֶרֶק קַמָּא דְחִגְיָה אָמְרִינָן מָה דְרַבֵּן זֶה מְכוּוֹן אֶת הַפָּרָה לְתַלְמֵיהָ לְהֵבִיא חַיִּים לְעוֹלָם וְכוּ'.

Indeed, the truth is, it appears that there was no difficulty in the beginning, i.e., there may be a simple solution. For Scripture writes, "But a rich harvest comes through the strength of the ox" (Prov. 14:4). I.e., a strong ox will allow for an effective plowing and sowing, and a

¹⁰ Ezek. 34:21, "with your horns you pushed at them." Micah 4:13, "I will give you horns of iron and provide you with hoofs of bronze, and you will crush many nations." Zech. 2:2 and 2:4, "the horns that tossed Judah." Ps. 22:22, "from the horns of wild oxen rescue me." In more general terms, horns are associated with power, such as Jer. 48:25, "The horn [i.e., might] of Moab has been cut down." Ezek. 29:21, "On that day, I will make sprout the horn [might] of the House of Israel."

¹¹ Horns have been used as storage containers as recently as the powder horns used into the 19th century for carrying gunpowder.

¹² In Greek folklore, however, it was the horn of a goat that was relevant.

larger crop yield than can be obtained with a weaker ox. **If so, the ox is the cause of the rich harvest when it works the land with its great strength. In the first chapter of Chagigah (3b), it is said:**

And [Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya] also commenced [his lecture] and taught: [It is written:] “The words of the wise are as cattle prods, and as nails well fastened are those that are composed in collections; they are given from one shepherd” (Eccl. 12:11). Why are matters of Torah compared to a cattle prod? To tell you that **just as this cattle prod directs the cow to her furrow to bring forth [sustenance for] life to the world**, so too the words of Torah direct those who study them from the paths of death to the paths of life.

- Chagigah 3b

וְנוֹדַע כִּי הַפֶּסֶד הַתְּבוּאָה בָּא מִשְׁנֵי אֹפְנִים, אוֹ שֶׁהִזְרִיעָה תְּהִיָּה נִפְסְדָת וְאִינָם יְכוּלִים לְזָרֹעַ כְּרֵאוּי, וְשֶׁאִסּוּר שֶׁצְמַחָה תִּתְקַלְקַל, לְזָה בָּא סִמָּן הַפְּרוֹת לומר שֶׁהִזְרִיעָה תְּהִיָּה מְקוּלְקָלָת וְאִסּוּר כִּד בָּא סִמָּן הַשְּׂבָלִים שֶׁאִי מֵה שֶׁתְּצַמַח הָאָרֶץ יִהְיֶה מְקוּלְקָל.

It is known that a loss of the harvest comes from two methods, either the sowing will be lost and they won't be able to sow properly, [or] after it has sprouted, it will spoil. For this, the cows came as a sign to tell Pharaoh that, because the cows will be weak, **the sowing will fail. Afterwards came the sign of the stalks, that even what the earth has sprouted will be spoiled.** This answers the two questions of the Zera Berach as to what relevance the cows had to show abundance or famine, and why the dream was presented with two different subjects. As Abarbanel¹³ explains on Gen. 41:1, the cows represent the plowing, and the stalks represent the harvest.

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¹³ Isaac ben Judah Abarbanel (Lisbon, 1437–Venice, 1508), Jewish statesman, philosopher, Bible commentator, and financier.