

Finding the Solution Within the Problem

Genesis, Chapter 41

1. It came to pass at the end of two full years, that Pharaoh was dreaming, and behold, he was standing by the Nile.
2. And behold, from the Nile were coming up seven cows, of handsome appearance and robust flesh, and they pastured in the marshland.
3. And behold, seven other cows were coming up after them from the Nile, of ugly appearance and lean of flesh, and they stood beside the cows [which were] on the Nile bank.
4. And the cows of ugly appearance and lean of flesh devoured the seven cows that were of handsome appearance and healthy; then Pharaoh awoke.
5. And he fell asleep and dreamed again, and behold, seven ears of grain were growing on one stalk, healthy and good.
6. And behold, seven ears of grain, thin and beaten by the east wind, were growing up after them.
7. And the thin ears of grain swallowed up the seven healthy and full ears of grain; then Pharaoh awoke, and behold, a dream.
8. Now it came to pass in the morning that his spirit was troubled; so he sent and called all the necromancers of Egypt and all its sages, and Pharaoh related to them his dream, but no one interpreted them for Pharaoh...
25. And Joseph said to Pharaoh, "Pharaoh's dream is one; what G-d is doing He has told Pharaoh.
26. The seven good cows are seven years, and the seven good ears of grain are seven years; it is one dream.
27. And the seven meager and ugly cows coming up after them are seven years, and the seven empty ears of grain, beaten by the east wind, will be seven years of famine.
32. And concerning the repetition of the dream to Pharaoh twice that is because the matter is ready [to emanate] from G-d, and G-d is hastening to execute it.
33. So now, let Pharaoh seek out an understanding and wise man and appoint him over the land of Egypt.
34. Let Pharaoh do [this] and appoint officials over the land and prepare the land of Egypt during the seven years of plenty.
35. And let them collect all the food of these coming seven good years, and let them gather the grain under Pharaoh's hand, food in the cities, and keep it.
36. Thus the food will remain as a reserve for the land for the seven years of famine which will be in the land of Egypt, so that the land will not be destroyed by the famine."
37. The matter pleased Pharaoh and all his servants.

פרק מא

א. ויהי מקץ שנתים
ימים ופרעה חלם



והנה עמד על היאר:

ב. והנה מן היאר עלת שבע פרות זפות מראה
ובריאת בשר ותרעינה באחו: ג. והנה שבע
פרות אחרות עלות אחריהן מן היאר רעות מראה
ודקות בשר ותעמדנה אצל הפרות על שפת
היאר: ד. ותאכלנה הפרות רעות המראה ונדקת
הבשר את שבע הפרות זפת המראה והבריאת
וייקץ פרעה: ה. ויישן ויחלם שנית והנה שבע
שבלים עלות בקנה אחד בריאות וטבות: ו.
והנה שבע שבלים דקות ושדופות קדים צמחות
אחריהן: ז. ותבלענה השבלים הדקות את שבע
השבלים הבריאות והמלאות וייקץ פרעה והנה
חלום: ח. ויהי בבקר ותפעם רוחו וישלח ויקרא
את כל חרטמי מצרים ואת כל חכמיה ויספר
פרעה להם את חלמו ואין פותר אותם לפרעה:
כח. ויאמר יוסף אל פרעה חלום פרעה אחד
הוא את אשר האלקים עשה הגיד לפרעה: כו.
שבע פרות הטבות שבע שנים הנה ושבע השבלים
הטבות שבע שנים הנה חלום אחד הוא: כז. ושבע
הפרות הרקות והרעות העלת אחריהן שבע שנים
הנה ושבע השבלים הרקות שדופות הקדים יהיו
שבע שני רעב:
לב. ועל השנות החלום אל פרעה פעמים כי נכון
הדבר מעם האלקים וממהר האלקים לעשותו:
לג. ועתה ירא פרעה איש נבון וחכם וישיתוהו על
ארץ מצרים: לד. יעשה פרעה ויפקד פקדים על
הארץ וחמש את ארץ מצרים בשבע שני השבע:
לה. ויקבצו את כל אכל השנים הטבות הבאת
האלה ויצברו בר תחת יד פרעה אכל בערים
ושמרו: לו. והיה האכל לפקדון לארץ לשבע שני
הרעב אשר תהיין בארץ מצרים ולא תכרת הארץ
ברעב: לז. ויטב הדבר בעיני פרעה ובעיני כל
עבדיו:

And it came to pass at the end of two years (41:1)

Midrash Tanchuma

"In every sorrow there is profit" (Proverbs 14:23). This, too, is said in regard to Joseph, who suffered in prison and then profited from it [in becoming] ruler over Egypt..

And Pharaoh was dreaming (41:1)

Midrash HaGadol

Should it not say, "and Pharaoh dreamed"? But this is to teach us that for those two years Pharaoh would see this dream each and every night, but would not remember it, until the time came for Joseph to come out of prison; that morning, he woke up and remembered it.

The Rebbe

Pharaoh dream predicted a famine which eventually caused Jacob and his family to settle in Egypt where a generation later they were enslaved in the Jewish people's first exile. Exile was caused by dreams because the reality of exile is analogous to a dream. Dreams consist of incoherent illusions where conflicting and contradictory elements can coexist. Similarly our lives in exile are a confusing blend of seemingly hypocritical behavior. We pray to G-d with absolute devotion, and yet in a matter of minutes we find ourselves acting in ways that contradict G-d's directives.

But there was none that could interpret them to Pharaoh (41:8)

Midrash Rabbah

There were indeed interpreters of the dreams, but "none that could interpret them to Pharaoh"--their interpretations were unacceptable to him. They said: the seven good cows mean that you will beget seven daughters; the seven ill-favored cows, that you will bury seven daughters...

The seven years of famine and seven years of plenty will occur simultaneously (41:35)

The Rebbe

An important detail of Pharaoh's famous dream is the fact that the seven lean cows stood side-by-side with the seven fat cows. Years of plenty and years of famine don't happen at the same time. The dreams must mean something else, Pharaoh's wise men thought, something less obvious, more metaphorical. Joseph's genius was that he understood that Pharaoh's dreams not only foretold events to come, but also instructed how to deal with them: they were telling Pharaoh to make the seven years of plenty coexist with the seven years of famine. When Joseph proceeded to tell Pharaoh how to prepare for the coming famine, he wasn't offering unasked-for advice; that advice was part of the dreams' interpretation. If you store the surplus grain from the plentiful years, Joseph was saying, then the seven fat cows will still be around when the seven lean cows emerge from the river—and the lean cows will have what to eat.

SUMMARY

- We all experience cycles of plenty and famine in our lives.
- During the good times, spiritually, emotionally or physically, we need to nurture our priorities and cultivate a sincere bond with G-d. The time and energy invested will provide us with the tools to survive during the crisis years of famine.
- Joseph's message: Use the fat cow to nourish the lean cow. Priorities cultivated during good times can sustain you during your bad times. Make the dream the solution.

