

MIKEITZ (GENESIS 41:1-44:17)

I Have a Dream!

2001 · Rabbi Yerachmiel Sepowitz

The Pharaoh couldn't sleep. He had dreamed about beautiful, healthy, fat cows. There were seven of them. They were cows that any cattleman would be proud to own. They stood majestically on the bank of the Nile, grazing on the grass that grew by the shore. The dream went downhill from there. Along came seven scrawny, emaciated cows and swallowed them right up! The fat cows were gone. Yet, the thin cows remained thin. (A dieter's dream! :-))

The Pharaoh woke up. What did it mean? What message was G-d sending to the king?

He fell back asleep and then saw Part Two. Almost the same dream. Seven healthy ears of grain, quickly swallowed by seven dried out ones. Again, no evidence of the swallowed items.

The king again woke up and was greatly agitated. What is meant by a dream in which seven good things are absorbed by seven bad things, with no visible change in the bad ones? He HAD to know!

Every magician and seer in his realm offered an interpretation, but none of the readings rang true. All the king's sorcerers and all the king's men couldn't put his majesty together again! :-) Finally, he heard about a Jewish kid in prison who could interpret dreams. The royal butler recalled to the king how Joseph had deciphered his dream. He and the royal baker had been in prison with Joseph. They both experienced disturbing dreams and Joseph offered them explanations. *"We told him our dreams, and he interpreted them. As he interpreted it to us, so it was. I was given back my position, and he (the baker) was hanged,"* (Genesis, 11-13)

The king had to see Joseph. After a shave and a haircut, Joseph was brought before the king to try his hand at interpreting the dreams.

Joseph told the king that G-d was telling him how to protect his country. Egypt was about to enjoy unprecedented wealth and prosperity. For the next seven years, the Egyptian economy would soar to historic levels (as indicated by the fat cows). There would be, to use present-day terms, a budget surplus. The seven prosperous years would be followed by seven years of devastating famine; a budget deficit. (The thin cows) The second dream, about the ears of grain, was a re-run of the same message, to emphasize the immediacy of the unfolding events.

Joseph advised the Pharaoh to begin a national rationing program to conserve food during the surplus years. He explained that the king needed to appoint a trustworthy administrator to supervise the program. He needed a "Food Czar."

Joseph had just written his own job description. The king was so impressed by Joseph's wisdom that he insisted that only Joseph could do the job. Literally overnight, Joseph was transformed from prisoner to Viceroy of Egypt!

Obviously, there was a Master Plan that was being fulfilled. Joseph was being put into a position of influence in order to facilitate the Israelite migration to Egypt. Without the Hebrews going TO Egypt, there could never be an Exodus FROM Egypt.

We can see the G-dly inspiration that enabled Joseph to understand the meaning of dreams. He obviously understood G-d's messages. However, a deeper analysis of these events shows us another, perhaps more fascinating facet of dream interpretation.

According to our Sages, a dream is a lower form, "one sixtieth," of prophecy. A dream is a message that needs to be interpreted. The meaning of the message is contained in the interpretation of the dream. The Midrash tells us that a dream's outcome depends upon how it is interpreted.

In other words, if you interpret a dream positively, the dream's message IS positive. If you find a negative way to read the dream, that's how it will come out. Let's read the butler's words again: "*We told him our dreams, and he interpreted them. As he interpreted it to us, so it was.*"

The way the Midrash reads this verse is that the positive outcome of the dream was directly related to Joseph's interpretation. Since Joseph understood the butler's dream as positive, it WAS positive. Had he come up with a negative reading of the dream, the result would have been negative.

I once asked my *Reb**be*, Rabbi A. Henschel Leibowitz Shlit"a, for advice. A friend had experienced repeated bad dreams, and was concerned about the meaning. "Give him a *Brochah* (blessing), he responded. "Have the person tell you, 'I had a dream,' and immediately respond, '*zol zein gutt!*' (It should be good!)"

A positive spin on a dream will lead to a positive result. It's up to us. Some dreams come as messages from G-d; some come from eating too much pizza before bedtime. How we view our dreams is in our control. We can look at a dream for inspiration, or we can write it off as indigestion.

The difference is whether we jump out of bed and take on the world or roll over and go back to sleep.

Have a great Shabbos.

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