

בס"ד

THE RASHI OF THE WEEK

Week of

Parshas Mikeitz

30 Kislev, 5783 – December 24, 2022

Compiled from the works of
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Vaad L'Hafotzas Sichos
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**An Outline of the Rebbe's Explanation of Rashi
Parshas Mikeitz**

Likkutei Sichos Volume 10, Pages 129 – 135

Rashi in His Own Words

בראשית מ"א, ח': ויהי בבקר ותפצם רוחו וישלח ויקרא את־כל־חֲרֻטְמֵי מִצְרַיִם וְאֶת־כָּל־חֲכָמֵיהֶם וַיְסַפֵּר לָהֶם אֶת־חֲלֹמוֹ וְאִי־
פותר אותם לפרעה:

Bereishis 41:8: Now it came to pass in the morning that his (Pharaoh's) spirit was troubled. He sent and called all the magicians and sages of Egypt. Pharaoh related his dream to all of them, but no one interpreted them for him.

Synopsis

This week's Torah portion, Mikeitz, begins by telling us two dreams which Pharaoh had. First, he dreamt of seven fat cows that arose from the Nile, followed by seven emaciated cows. The thin cows then consumed the robust ones. He then had a second dream, wherein seven healthy ears of grain were eaten by seven thin and parched ears. In the morning, none of Pharaoh's wise men could interpret the dreams to his satisfaction.

Pharaoh repeated his dreams to Yosef. Yosef told Pharaoh that both dreams conveyed the same message. Egypt would enjoy seven years of plenty. Following this, there would be seven years of famine. Furthermore, aside from just interpreting the dreams, Yosef devised a plan. He suggested that they store the excess grain of the years of plenty for it to serve during the famine years. Pharaoh was impressed by Yosef's wisdom. He was so impressed that he appointed him ruler over Egypt.

Rashi explains everything which the beginning student needs to know to understand Peshat. There is a pronounced question here that we can ask. Yosef's explanation seems obvious. Why couldn't the professional fortune-tellers and dream interpreters explain the dream as Yosef did? Why was Pharaoh so impressed with Yosef? Finally, why did Yosef conclude by offering Pharaoh advice? Pharaoh only asked him to interpret the dreams.

The explanation is clear from the first dream. Pharaoh saw the seven fat cows, which symbolized seven years of bounty, standing together with the seven emaciated cows. Since each cow represented a different time, how could they all stand together? The explanation is in Yosef's advice. During the years of plenty, they would begin to experience famine years because they would be preparing for them. Likewise,

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during the years of famine, they would feel the years of plenty because they would be living from what had been put away.

Rashi's Explanation

This explanation of Rashi is different from most. Usually, the Rebbe explains something which Rashi *does* explain in the Parshah. Here, however, our difficulty is understanding something Rashi does not explain. Rashi explains everything that the beginning student needs to understand Peshat. We see this from the instances in which Rashi writes, "I don't know." He writes this, although other commentaries know and explain the meaning in every such instance. They weren't "smarter" than Rashi. What Rashi meant by "I don't know" is that he doesn't know an explanation according to Peshat. Other commentators explain the same verse according to different approaches to understanding the Torah. When we encounter a difficulty Rashi does not explain, it must mean one of two things. It is not a question, or Rashi explained it earlier. We shall see as the Rebbe's explanation unfolds the seeming difficulty and its answer.

Difficulties in Understanding Rashi

This week's Torah portion, Mikeitz, begins with two dreams which Pharaoh dreamt¹. He first dreamed of seven fat cows coming from the Nile River. They were followed by seven lean cows standing beside the first group of seven. The seven lean ones then swallowed up the seven fat cows. He then awoke. After falling back asleep, he dreamt of seven plump ears of grain that grew from one stalk. Seven lean ears of grain grew after them and swallowed the first seven.

The Torah tells us that neither he nor any dream interpreters or fortune-tellers in Egypt could understand what the dreams meant. As a result of this, Pharaoh was distressed. Finally, they brought Yosef out of prison to interpret Pharaoh's dreams. Yosef explained to Pharaoh that both dreams were one. The seven fat cows and fat stalks represented seven years of plenty. The seven skinny cows and stalks meant there would be seven years of famine after the seven years of plenty. The famine would be so great that they would forget the years of plenty. That is the meaning of the second group of seven swallowing the first. Yosef said that Pharaoh should appoint someone in charge of Egypt's land. Throughout the seven years of plenty, this person should see to it that they would save food from all over Egypt throughout the seven years of plenty. Pharaoh and his servants were all thrilled with this interpretation. Pharaoh was so impressed by Yosef's brilliance that he appointed him in charge.

1. See our Parshah, beginning with Bereishis 41:1.

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There seems to be nothing that impressive about Yosef's explanation of Pharaoh's dream. The dreams seem to be straightforward. Rashi himself comments that the Nile was the source of Egypt's sustenance. At the beginning of our Torah Portion, he writes, "human-made canals cover the entire land of Egypt, and the Nile rises in their midst and waters them. This is because it does not usually rain in Egypt like in other countries." Since the Nile is the source of Egypt's bounty (or lack thereof), it seems clear that seven fat, well-fed cows coming out of the Nile would signify seven years of bounty. How much more is it true of seven healthy, large stalks of grain? The grain is that which the cows ate to become large! Since the grain grows once yearly, it's only logical that the seven units represent seven years.

Likewise, emaciated cows coming out of the Nile and seven lean ears of grain symbolize seven years of famine. There does not seem to be anything profound about Yosef's explanation, yet Rashi does not explain why Pharaoh was so impressed.

Additionally, the magicians, who were professionals, were not able to satisfy Pharaoh with their interpretation of his dream. Just what was their explanation? Rashi tells us that the magicians said², "you will father seven daughters, and you will then bury them." Why did they offer an interpretation so far removed from the literal meaning of the dream? Rashi quotes this explanation from the Midrash³. Yet the Midrash includes other explanations of the dreams which the magicians offered. Why does Rashi only mention this particular one?

Finally, according to the verse's simple meaning, why did Yosef continue speaking after he completed his interpretation of the dreams? He told Pharaoh,⁴ "and⁵ now, let Pharaoh seek out an understanding and wise man and appoint him over the land of Egypt." He began with the word "and," In other words, it directly followed his interpretation of Pharaoh's dream. But what followed did not come to explain the dreams. Instead, he offered Pharaoh advice on how to deal with the situation. He suggested that he place someone in charge and appoint people to save the grain from the years of plenty to eat in famine years. No one asked Yosef for advice. Yet again, Rashi is silent.

Some commentaries explain why Yosef added these words of advice⁶. He told Pharaoh that as king of Egypt, G-d revealed to him what would happen for a reason. Hashem was not merely trying to cause him

2. Our Parshah, Bereishis 41:8.

3. See Bereishis Rabbah 89, 6.

4. Our Parshah, Bereishis 41:33.

5. The word "and" implies that this was a continuation of his previous words.

6. See the second and third explanations of the Abarbanel in this verse. See also the comments of the Gur Aryeh, the Kli Yakar, and the Ohr Hachaim.

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pain but giving him a chance to prepare for the years of famine. However, if that was the case, Yosef should have expressly stated as much. From his words, it sounds like this is a part of the explanation of the dream.

The Explanation

The magicians' interpretation, which Rashi quotes from the Midrash, is the key to understanding why the beginning student is not bothered by these questions. He writes, "you will father seven daughters, and you will bury seven daughters." By only citing that interpretation, Rashi points out the difficulty in explaining Pharaoh's dream. His dream began⁷ "from the Nile were coming up seven cows, of handsome appearance and robust flesh, and they pastured in the marshland. And behold, seven other cows were coming up after them from the Nile, of ugly appearance and lean flesh, and they stood beside the cows on the Nile bank." In other words, all fourteen cows were standing together on the bank of the Nile. Each represented a different year, seven years of prosperity and seven years of poverty. Yet they were all together at the same time. Years, a unit of time, is divided into past, present, and future. None of these can co-exist. Yet they were all together. That was why the magicians disregarded the obvious.

However, fathering seven daughters and burying seven daughters can take place at the same time. When this story took place, it was common for people to have more than one wife, and Kings certainly had multiple wives. Indeed, the king of decadent Egypt, steeped in immorality, had numerous wives. No doubt, Pharaoh had many wives and concubines. It was easy to imagine both fathering and burying at the same time. However, how can we reconcile a year of bounty and one of poverty together?

That explains why Yosef gave Pharaoh advice. The advice was a part of Pharaoh's dreams. They would experience years of bounty together with those of famine. How is this possible? During the years of plenty, they would be preparing for famine. During the years of famine, they would be eating from what they saved during plenty.

A Deeper Lesson from Rashi

Pharaoh's dreams and Yosef's interpretations brought about *both* our exile and redemption from Egypt. Because he interpreted the dreams, Yosef became the Egyptian ruler. The above ultimately led to Yaakov and his family moving there. Subsequent events brought about our becoming enslaved in Egypt, leading to our ultimate redemption. The above clarifies that the dreams' content and interpretation express the concept of exile and redemption.

7. Our Parshah, Bereishis 41:2-3.

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Chassidic philosophy⁸ explains the verse⁹, "when the Lord returns the returnees to Zion, we shall be like dreamers." Just as in a dream, one can see two opposites; the same is true of exile. At the time of prayer, we can feel complete trust in G-d. However, immediately after praying, one can become overly troubled with financial and business problems. The same was true of Pharaoh's dreams. They contained two opposites, yet Yosef's interpretation was able to reconcile them. Genuine trust in G-d does not allow for feeling any financial worries. May we accomplish this job and bring the complete redemption now.

(Adapted from a talk given on Shabbos Parshas Mikeitz, 5732 and 5734)

I hope you gained as much by reading this as I did by translating and adapting it.

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You can find us on the web at www.RebbeTeachesRashi.org.

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8. See Torah Ohr to Parshas Vayaishev, beginning with page 28, c. See also Toras Chaim to Parshas Mikeitz beginning with page 74, b. The same idea is discussed in a number of other sources.

9. Tehillim 126:1.

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THE LUBAVITCHER REBBE**

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IN HONOR OF

The Soldiers of "Tzivos Hashem"

Chaim, Aiden Oded, and Zacharya Matan שיהיו
Morris

May they merit to be a source of Chassidic pride
to their family and a Torah light to their community

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Rabbi & Mrs. **Menachem M. and Chaya Mushka** שיהיו
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IN HONOR OF

Mrs. Esther שתהי' **Sharabani**

May she go from strength to strength
in health, happiness, Torah, and mitzvot

*

DEDICATED BY HER SON

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